

Those Less Worthy

Disclaimer: Harry Potter and the deriving themes, characters, plotlines etc belong to J. K. Rowling. As if you thought any different when you found this on a fanfiction site.

Summary: Hogwarts is the most elite Wizarding School in the country; only the richest are allowed in. So what happens when, in a twist of fates falling from one turning point in time, Harry Potter doesn't make the cut?

Author's Note: I told myself I wouldn't post this until it was completely finished ... but I haven't updated any of my other stories for a while, so I figured; I might as well give you guys something. I'm currently up to about 40,000 words ... depending on the feedback, I'll probably be updating again in about a week or so. Maybe sooner, maybe later.

At the end of each chapter (which I estimate will be anywhere between 3 to 8 thousand words long) I will be copy-pasting a small commentary on what, exactly, I was thinking at the time while writing. These aren't so much Author's Notes as background information on the story and notes I made while typing.

Anyhow, enjoy the story!

Chapter One: How It Began

It was May, spring time in the grassy hills of Northern Scotland where the prestigious and beautiful school of magic, Hogwarts, resided. A young couple entered the tall, wrought-iron gates with content smiles on their faces as they re-entered a lush, familiar scene they had spent many-a afternoon laying or wandering about during their own school days.

The taller of the two, a man with wind-swept black hair and keen hazel eyes hidden behind thin round glasses, smiled down at his new wife. He had been married to the red-haired beauty just three months previous; he still couldn't believe she had accepted, let alone that she proudly wore the engraved golden ring on her thin, pale fingers.

As if sensing his thoughts, the woman turned to meet his gaze with stunning emerald eyes that flared with power, a light dusting of freckles adorning her nose. She smiled prettily up at him and slipped her hand into his, interlacing their fingers loosely as they made their way up the steep, winding path to the elaborate castle before them.

At the open entrance doors, a tall, thin woman with a sharp face and tightly knotted hair greeted them with a fond smile and escorted them to an office in the depths of the school. There, the couple were directed to sit before an aged man with twinkling blue eyes, who beamed kindly at them and their obvious love for each other.

He folded his hands before him, and spoke.

The reason he had called them there was something he had thought on for many, many months, and he was glad the plan was finally being put in action. He had already recruited the couple's friends to his cause, the Heir to a powerful and influential Ancient family, and a studious werewolf – all that was needed was their agreement, and he could begin recruitment of the next hopeful prospects to join his steadily growing Order against the Dark Lord and his forces-

"No."

The old man broke from his thoughts, his eyes wide and surprised.

"I'm sorry," the woman looked on him sadly, pleading with her eyes. "But we've only just found each other. I understand what you're trying to achieve, I truly do, but James and I – we can't be a part of that, not yet." Her free hand traced the back of her partner's, and his hand also came across to grasp her second one tightly. "We want to start a family. I couldn't – we couldn't raise a child in an environment like that. I'm sorry, Albus–"

The man was quick to reassure them that it was alright, perfectly natural of hopeful parents-to-be, and that he was in no way disappointed or angry at them for turning down his request. His eyes continued to shine as the couple was guided out by the admittedly disappointed stern-faced woman, and his hands folded primely on his lap for a while as he thought sagely.

He soon came to the conclusion that the goings-on of that day were of no consequence. The Potters had had the potential to become

valuable allies in the war against Voldemort, but they were not invaluable. What was one young, inexperienced couple against the hundreds of other, far more experienced persons he hoped to recruit? Lily Potter nee Evans may be a potions prodigy, James Potter may have achieved highest marks in his year for the art of Transfiguration, but they were not irreplaceable. And if they could not be convinced to join his cause – he knew they would never, never join the dark, of that he was most certain – then they were no longer any concern of his.

In any case, he already had the Blacks, in the form of James' friend Sirius. And when Sirius' mother – whose health was notably failing of recent times – finally passed on, the legacy and wealth of the Black Family would be at his fingertips.

And so it was that the Potters soon fell from all thought, hidden in the background, sitting on forgotten sidelines as they watched a war wage around them. They had had the opportunity to become great, to become soldiers in a battle against evil, but they had passed this in favor of a future of their own choosing. Now, to the old headmaster, they were but past Head Boy, and Head Girl; and there was one of those every year, hardly anything special to be commemorated for.

Their two friends, Sirius and Remus, had both taken the old man's offer and become members of the prestigious Order. As months passed, they spent more and more time apart; by the time Lily was due her first child, late in July of the year 1980, they were little more than distant friends, once-friends, friends you could pause and chat with on a busy street should the need arise.

So young Harry James Potter, Lily and James Potter's first child, was the godson of no one. Born in the first minute of the first day in August, with thick black hair and dark blue eyes James prayed would ease into green, he was an angel in the young couple's mind.

And the world kept on turning.

James Potter, being the Heir to a Noble and Ancient House, decided on a safe, stable job in the Magical Artifacts Department, spell-casting and paperwork and a good, steady income. His young son was often seen laying or sitting in a spelled cradle beside him, silent to all but James, playing with flashing balls and singing books and

figurines of various animals or shapes. The child's eyes – green, as James had hoped for – were constantly alight with curiosity and joy, and his small rounded face was in a near perpetual grin as he looked out on the world around him.

In an effort to earn as many savings as they could in the dark times they lived, Lily Potter, a brilliant witch in potions and complicated charm work, was accepted into the mysterious ranks of the Unspeakables. The Unspeakables were the researchers and spellcasters of the Ministry, whose purpose ranged from monitoring the passage of time, to safe-keeping the Arch of Death. Lily herself was allocated to a small office researching the existence of Soul Magics, the possibilities which lay in such magic.

Even as all this happened, as life moved on and Harry continued to grow, the war raged on around them. It wasn't uncommon to step into work one morning, to find your partner or the woman who had worked across the isle was gone.

But one day, one night – one very, very memorable Halloween – that finally changed for good.

The Dark Lord Voldemort, who was feared so much even his name caused wizards and witches to flinch, was dead. Dead at the hands of a child, a mere babe, Neville Longbottom. Lord Voldemort had broken into the Longbottom Manor that night, torn the wards and blasted his way into the house. He had turned his wand on Frank Longbottom, and stalked to the room where Alice – a woman two years Lily's senior – had pleaded and begged, and finally died, for her infant son.

But then, when Voldemort turned to the small, fat child – his curse had rebounded, leaving an empty body, a confused child with a razor-sharp scar across his forehead and nose, and an elderly grandmother who staggered into the sitting room the next morning, only to find the cold body of her only son and Heir.

The next morning, James and Lily had stumbled into work – James, as usual, laden with the fourteen-month old Harry – to find celebration.

And when they found that the bane of their existence, the one who had destroyed their lives, the lives of the ones around them, over

and over and over again, was dead ... no words could describe their joy. Finally, finally, they could raise their son ... and, Lily thought slyly, and future children they might conceive ... in a peaceful world ignorant of war and death.

And for a while; everything was good.

Harry was two and a half years old – walking, just beginning to discover the nuances of speech – when it happened.

The Incident.

The thing that changed ... everything.

James had been unable to take Harry that morning; their Boss was performing a spot check of the offices, and he needed to hide the young walker lest he be told off again for bringing his son into work. Lily had offered to take the child, as her workmates had no problems with the adorable boy and in fact welcomed his youth and innocence into a job that could, at times, be downright depressing in the secretive nature and distrust.

She had set the boy in a magically conjured pen to one side, making sure to lock it tightly. She and her work partner Angela were on the verge of a breakthrough with the bizarre object they were instructed to investigate, and she didn't want to worry Harry would stumble into the way.

But – so involved with the silver charm she was investigating, she soon lost track of time and space, as she always did down there.

She didn't notice when the young, hungry child performed his first bout of accidental magic, canceling the ward she had formed around him.

She didn't notice when he toddled over to a low shelf hitched against one wall.

She didn't notice when he giggled, and rummaged through the small, glass – and above all else, shiny – bottles she and Angela kept there.

But she did notice when she heard the loud, expensive-sounding smash.

Whirling, screaming, drawing her wand and casting every preventative and protective spell she could think of, she envasceo'd hundreds, if not thousands of galleons worth of potions, items, ingredients, parchments, contained spells ... leaving one small, startled and barely conscious Harry sitting in a pile of shattered glass, splintered wood and broken lives echoing into the futures of so, so many.

The damage to young Harry was, at first, indeterminable; he had no physical injury thanks to Lily's quick spellwork, but his developing accidental magic had been extremely active ever since the Incident, and she and James feared he way have absorbed, or been affected magically, by some of the substances he had unwittingly pulled onto himself. Yet, at such a tender age, there was no telling what had been inflicted on him; so, the matter was pressed to the rear of their minds in favor of a far more immediate problem.

Because the damage to Lily, to James, to their entire family, had been far, far worse.

The items Lily had envasceo'd, sending to an alternate realm where they were literally torn atom from atom and eliminated from existence for all of eternity, totaled one hundred and seven thousand, sixty two galleons, ten sickles and a knut. Her employer – now, ex-employer – had told her flatly and almost jokingly, he would let the knut slide. But every single other sickle, every single other galleon – must, must, must be repaid.

James, having just months before inherited his legacy when his not-yet aged father fell to one of the last Death Eater raids, bypassed the tearful Lily – who claimed she could work herself to pay the debt – and spent almost the entire Potter Inheritance and Fortune to satisfy the extremely angered Ministry. Then, upon a very strong suggestion from the Head of his Department, resigned. And told to never approach the Ministry, or any of their enterprises, ever again.

Lily was heartbroken. In one move, one hour, one moment, all they had worked for was gone. They had no one to turn to; the few friends they had were friends from work, and as such unapproachable. Sirius and James had long fallen out of contact,

when Sirius took up the mantle as Defense Professor at Hogwarts for two years running, thus breaking the supposed "curse" on the position. Remus was – somewhere, James had fallen from contact with him also. Dumbledore hadn't spared them so much as a second thought since them turning down his offer to join the Order. Lily's parents had passed away in a car accident five years previously; James' own parents were dead. Lily's sister was a muggle, and hateful of magic; James was an only child.

They had no one.

So, with what little money they had left, with the savings they had scrounged together from their respective, well-paying jobs, they began to plan. There was nothing for them here; the Ministry refused to offer them employment after the disaster of the Incident, and the few factories or magical shops hiring closed their doors and pulled the shutters whenever they saw the downtrodden pair coming; their reputation preceding them.

It did not take long for Lily and James to discover there was nothing to be had in the Ministry, in central London, in Hogwarts, among any of their old friends or alliances. They couldn't be here anymore.

So they turned their eyes elsewhere. And began to plan their departure.

They made plans, their eyes moving from the Wizarding community in central London and away to the outskirts, where they could both afford to live comfortably, and perhaps be more able to find jobs, as well as a place to raise Harry. So, looking over what money they had left, they found themselves drawn to a magical community in the eastern London, hidden in wizard-space and magically expanded alleyways much in the same way they Diagon and Knockturn Alleys had been.

The community had extremely cheap residential areas – sporting a three bedroomed apartment they could afford to deposit on with the money they had – and a population of just over three thousand magical beings, the third largest magical settlement in Britain, but also one of the poorest. There were plenty of retail stores and a handful of spell-crafting and -casting workshops James could enquire into, which were not controlled or owned by the Ministry – meaning he could likely find employment there with minimal difficulty.

And, the advantages of being a magic-only community meant the trace wasn't in effect, those underage could practice magic for home-schooling purposes, and there were children's schools that taught not only reading and writing, but also extremely basic concepts of potions and classes on how to hold a wand correctly among other rudimentary wizarding skills.

The community was, admittedly, darker than Lily or James had grown knowing in their own, sheltered families ... but with the little means they had, there wasn't much better that they could afford, and they were growing desperate.

Lily and James decided within a week of searching through the Prophet for ads, to purchase the home, and the next Monday sold the deed to their cottage in Godric's Hollow. The small number of galleons they received in return was immediately put into repayments for their new mortgage, and three days later their things had been packed, Harry was strapped to James' chest for floo transport, and they were ready to leave.

There wasn't really anyone they wanted, or needed, to say goodbye to. The past few years had been lonely for the once popular young couple. They felt there really was nothing left for them here; with little to no money, a new family and no job to be found in central London, it was time to move on.

With a whisk of green flames and a muttered direction, the three of them – Lily and James discretely clutching each other's hands in the family-sized public floo fireplace – disappeared.

The apartment was located on one of the streets magically expanded within the wizard-space; an entire suburb compressed into an area the size of a football field and the entrance hidden as a mysteriously locked Janitor's door in an abandoned gymnasium. The sun shone, yes, though there was more often rain in the old-style town formed from black and grey bricks, steep and narrow alleyways and a jumble of buildings thrown together, every second one an after-thought during planning.

There was a centralized street where one or two of the locally-owned stores were situated, with numerous thin alleyways branching off in all directions to different apartment strings or long, twisted buildings, all of them densely packed to compensate for the

limited space the magically-expanded town provided. After dropping their shrunken boxes off at the three-story, thin apartment, Lily and James were shown around by an equally thin man in a long brown cloak. There was a grand total of one and a half parks in the town, with three swings, two park benches and seven trees, one of them flowering. There was a primary school for the younger children, and a stone courtyard just beyond the initial entrance to the town.

Three thousand residents, including over two hundred children under the age of eleven. A town built almost entirely from black conjured stone, wood and magic. Minimal Ministry intervention, although admittedly with a strong black market undercurrent. A small, out-of-the-way hospital next to a tiny fountain flowing with magically filtered water. This place, this town, was known collectively to its residents and rare visitors as Were, derived from the term werewolf and named as such for its nature of appearing dangerous and deathly at first, although, if time was taken to dig deeper ... so much more could be found.

At least, that's what their guide – a local storekeeper – had said.

It wasn't the most elegant place, nor the most beautiful, but it was about as far away from the Leaky Cauldron, and the Ministry, as Lily and James could get without leaving London, something they just couldn't bring themselves to do. It was functional, affordable, and goddammit it might just work.

If someone had told James, freshly graduated from Hogwarts a mere five years ago, that he would have ended up here of all places, he would have laughed.

But now, looking up at the drizzly white sky, his wife's hand in his own and his son on his hip, he couldn't imagine himself anywhere else.

Commentary: Origins

This is just a silly little plot-bunny spawning from reading far too much fanfiction. One of the stories I recently read (I forget the name) mentioned in passing "only those with the means, or ability to earn a scholarship, go to Hogwarts." I then realized just how expensive Hogwarts must be – for the Head of a Ministry Department (I am, of course, talking about Arthur Weasley) to live on the brink of

destitution just to send his children there. Admittedly, there are a lot of children – but think about it. How many truly poor children do you see at Hogwarts? Children whose parents are unemployed, bankrupt or unable to earn money? Almost all of the students are either sons or daughters of well-known / highly-placed Ministry personnel (Susan Bones, Draco Malfoy, even Ronald Weasley would count), Heirs to incredibly large fortunes (Harry Potter, Neville Longbottom) or from very well-off Muggle families (Hermione, whose parents are highly paid Dentists, Justin Finch-Fletchy, who was once destined for Eton of all places.)

And the very few exceptions – Tom Marvolo Riddle, Severus Snape – are extremely powerful, more than powerful enough for a scholarship. Although, for the sake of a working plot, there will be no scholarships in this fanfiction – basically, either you have money, and go to Hogwarts, or you don't. Pretend the orphanage was willing to pay such an amount to have Tom off their hands and Severus' Mum was a midnight cat burglar, whatever tickles your fancy.

So, from the before mentioned sentence sprang the idea of; what happens if you don't go to Hogwarts? Then; why wouldn't you go to Hogwarts? Then; what if Harry didn't go to Hogwarts? Then; why wouldn't Harry go to Hogwarts?

And finally; how do I make a workable plot out of all this?

And the rest flowed on from there.

Oh, but please, don't forget to review! It won't make the story longer, or better ... but it might make me update quicker! (dangles carrot)

Chapter Two: Tears and Revelations

Two weeks later, and James had secured a job as a spellcaster for the owner of a small, friendly shop selling magical containment items such as trunks, magically expanded handbags – all requiring tricky spells, charms and transfigurations the aging man simply couldn't manage any more. Being proficient in all these areas – having achieved the highest score in transfiguration in all of Britain for his NEWTs – James was quick to offer his services. His new employer, Callistus, was alone in the world after the early death of his wife, and had singlehandedly run the admittedly slow business for the past three decades. James' presence would be a godsend, to quote him, and much appreciated.

Lily, meanwhile, was sitting in the small living area, watching as her ever-boisterous son knocked two painted blocks together and wondering just how she was going to break the news to her husband.

Eventually, she decided on the ... direct approach.

"I'm pregnant."

To say he was surprised would have been a gross understatement.

The second Potter son, a child born on the 24th of March in the year 1983, had the same dark, tufty hair as his older brother, who hung off the side of the crib curiously. The child's name was to be Jonas Christopher Potter, after James' grandfather and Lily's father. Within a handful of weeks of his birth, his eyes darkened to a soft hazel-grey already alight with mischief. To the few friends James and Lily had already met within the dark town, he was adorable, cuddly and a bundle of joy, a blessing of light to such a dark place.

To Harry, who had begun his mastery of the English language a couple of months prior, he was loud, fat and squishy-looking. James had merely chuckled and brushed a soft fringe of hair from his first son's smooth forehead, kissing it soundly and giving his shoulder a gentle nudge into the kitchen.

Five months later, and it was Harry's third birthday celebration, the first celebration that would be held in his new home. It was also the time that all young witches and wizards were taken to their nearest medi-witch or -wizard for their first check-up, immunization and the

measuring of their magical core, a standard procedure designed to pick up on squibs early in life and avoid disappointment in later years.

The Potters, however, were not concerned about Harry's magical power; the walker was quite liberal with his grasp of accidental magic, which was looking a little less 'accidental' in Lily's eyes if she were to be honest to herself. The check-up was merely a confirmation, a chance for young parents to boast of their children's ability and a certificate they could slip into the baby-books they were steadily building for both Harry and Jonas.

The four Potters – Lily cradling Jonas, James holding Harry's tiny hand – maneuvered their way through the shadowed alleys expertly. It was too short a distance to floo, apparition was risky with young children, a portkey was out of the question - and in any case it was nice to get out of the house once in a while, meet the neighbours, appreciate the glimpse of sky they could see beyond the towering rickety houses around them.

The medical building for Were consisted of two linked and renovated units, both of them the standard three-stories high, with a swinging sign above the perpendicular steps to the elevated front doors. For all that it appeared dark and gloomy from the exterior, the inside was a pleasant shade of white and lilac, and the small reception area was decorated with waving past-Healers and a vase of singing, harmonized daffodils.

The Healer's office was similarly designed, and Harry was soon sitting on the edge of a levitating bed, his sandal-clad feed swinging happily as the male, green-robed Healer cast spell after casual spell at his small body.

The first was to check his ear canals, lungs and heartbeat – all perfectly functioning and operational. The next measured his blood pressure, and a third wrote a small chart detailing Harry's height, weight and shoe size. This charm revealed Harry to be a touch below average, although it was nothing a few nutritional potions and monitors on his food intake couldn't handle. A fourth charm revealed Harry may have needed glasses, but a quick spell on his behalf remedied that in just a few moments.

"Everything seems to be in order," the Healer smiled at the anxious parents, Lily smiling gratefully back at him as she soothed Jonas quietly. "I'll just fetch the potions, then I can check the little one's core and we'll be home free."

The muggle reference flew right over James' head, of course, but he smiled none the less and pointed out a few of the brighter, more colourful posters to Harry while they waited.

Soon enough, the Healer was back with a wooden tray bearing ten or so differently coloured vials. Harry grimaced in exaggerated expressions as he swallowed each of them, only one of them an injection to be applied directly to his bloodstream. This was achieved swiftly and painlessly thanks to well-cast numbing charms, and finally all that was left was the magical core check.

"Now, if you'll stand by my desk – yes, next to the frame with the dancing Grindylows is fine – we don't want you interfering with the results, and I'll just-" and, with a flick of his wand, a soft white light fell from the tip to trickle over Harry's body. He giggled as it tickled his skin lightly, sinking into him and gathering in his torso just below his heart, but above his stomach – the centre of his body, and his magical core.

For a few long moments, nothing happened. James glanced at the Healer, trying to remember if his own measuring had taken this long, when suddenly-

Harry flared with power. With light, with raw energy, he didn't just harness it, he was it, it was intoxicating, breathtaking, it shook his own core in response and he couldn't even move until-

It faded. Swiftly, it crept down, sinking into Harry's trembling body as the impossibly bright and pure magic receded.

"Impossible," the Healer breathed, staring at the now unconscious boy with painfully wide eyes. "No body can hold that much magic and still – and still be ..." His eyes wandered to the sheet of magically conjured parchment sitting on his desk, containing information on the child's weight and height – both of them lower than average by a fair amount, despite his parents' caring attention. "It could be, that ... that to compensate for such – power, that his body has been ..." His eyes turned to the parents, who were staring

at their child in a mixture of wonder, worry and fear – not fear of him, but fear for him. His eyes were quick to note the distinct lack of surprise.

"Has anything happened to him, anything at all, that could explain ... this?" He waved his hand to where Harry was sprawled on his back, before moving to rearrange the boy's limp limbs to a more comfortable-looking posture.

Lily tore her eyes away from Harry, stroked Jonas' head – the baby had slept through the entire ordeal – and licked her lips before answering.

"When ... when he was about twenty-five months, just after his second birthday ... I used to work as an Unspeakable in the Ministry. I took him into work that day because James couldn't take him, Harry broke out of his pen and -" Lily shook her head, gratefully leaning into the arm James draped around her shoulders comfortingly. "He got into the shelves, where we kept all our most expensive or – or dangerous experiments. They – fell. Onto him, I couldn't stop it, I couldn't do – do anything-" By then, Lily was crying, and James gently brushed the tears away while the Healer looked on with sympathy. It was always hard for parents – especially young ones – when their children were hurt, but it was even more so when the problem was magical, and therefore far more complex to heal, rather than physical.

The Healer looked down at the sleeping child, cast a spell to ensure his unconsciousness was from magical exhaustion rather than anything critical, then walked to his desk and sat slowly, waving a hand to indicate Lily and James should seat themselves opposite him. He leant forward, folding his arms on the edge of the desk, and looked over at the married couple seriously.

"I have ... never met a magical person with so much power," he confided in a low voice. "Though I've heard of them but – I regret to say it – they have never been found here ... in Were. The people here just aren't as powerful as the paternal Pureblood lines, I'm afraid," he smiled humorlessly, aware of James' legacy and history before the lacking life he lived now. "We don't have anything close to the facilities or teachings those of richer families do. I know the Potters were one of the ... lesser Pureblooded families, but I don't

suppose you have any family libraries, books – perhaps a convenient mansion tucked away somewhere?"

James shook his head – those had been lost to the Potter family for decades, the manor falling in Grindelwald's time, along with it the extensive library and thousands of galleons worth of books. That had only marked the beginning of the deterioration of the Potter House; two wars in such quick succession had not been kind to the generous and charitable family.

"I thought not," the Healer sighed. "If you had, you would not be here. In any other situation, anywhere but here, such a core would indeed be a blessing ... however ... in a community where it will only ever remain untrained and unprotected, I fear for his safety; I fear for those around him. Children are prone to accidental magic, yes; but those with cores as large as Harry's here are almost always taught from a very young age to control said core."

Lily closed her eyes, her fingers tightening on the one-piece Jonas was snoring gently into.

"What ... what does this mean?"

"It means ... that your son, Lily, is in a very large amount of danger, if he can't learn to control himself - consciously and subconsciously. Accidental magic originates from the deepest recesses of the untrained mind; in order to prevent any ... unfortunate situations, Harry will need to have the strictest control over himself and his emotions, it is the only way-" James flinched, but the man continued relentlessly; they needed to hear this, "- it's the only way he will ever live anything close to normal life," the Healer's eyes were older than they'd ever been, filled with weary pain. Parents usually rejoined at this age; to discover the future of their children's prowess, to confirm once and for all that their heirs, that their sons and daughters, would experience the same wonder and power they did ... but for the Potters, here and now, he could see there would be no such joy. This, he thought bitterly, was the most prime example he could think of too much of a good thing.

"The best thing I can suggest is daily meditation, try to keep him as calm as you can to minimize accidental magic, try to keep his core under control – the meditation should aid this, he may even become

magically sensitive over time – but, if worst comes to absolute, groundbreaking worst ... we'll have no choice but to channel him."

"What?" Lily was unfamiliar with the term, though James paled dramatically and stared at the Healer in fear. "Channel him? I don't think I've heard of that, have you Ja—" Having caught a glimpse of her husband's face, Lily suddenly realized that something was very, very wrong; and that only meant that channelling was very, very bad. "James?"

"I take it you are ... unfamiliar with this term?" the Healer's eyes focused on Lily, ignoring the pained looks James was now casting his comatose son.

"I – yes, what is it?"

"Channelling is ... not something we very often do anymore, it used to be used as – as punishment in the Medieval times, or as a way for wizards to go undetected in the Witch Hunts. It is, essentially ... draining the witch or wizard of their power, diverting this power into something – an object, a, a person, say – and removing all magic from said witch or wizard until such a time as it naturally self-replenishes," the Healer spoke as smoothly and methodically as possible, trying to keep a calm and detached face.

In truth, however, his heart was breaking to suggest such a thing.

Magic was, truly, sacred to witches and wizards. Even those who did not train their magic cherished it. It was a light in the dark, a fire in the cold, a constant presence in their life that pulsated through them from the moment they were born to the moment they passed. Muggleborns blessed with magic would know from birth they were different to those around them, simply from this second heartbeat, this invisible force they could feel that no one around them shared.

To have that force removed, to have your magic taken from you, was nothing short of one of the most traumatic experiences known to wizardkind.

In recent years, the technique had been taken and applied in medicine, stealing a sick core from witches who had become inflicted with temporary ailments, removing wounds or infections from wizards who had caught the rare flu which affected the magical

core. It was only temporary – the core would replenish itself completely over the course of two to three months – but those first few weeks, with little to no magic at all, were notoriously the worst. He himself had seen only one wizard that had been channelled, in his fourth week since removal, and it had not been a pretty sight.

It tore him apart to have to actually be the one to recommend this treatment, and to a mere child. But, until he spoke with a few of his friends who wrote the monthly Medi-Wizard Journals, he didn't know what he could do. Work the child into magical exhaustion? The boy didn't even own a wand! Cut him off from his core? That was just as bad as removing it, if not worse. Magical barriers which removed half, or a quarter of a wizard's core were unpredictable and dangerous, not to mention he wasn't even sure it would hold on such a large core in the first place.

No. This was the only option – but it was to be a last resort only, he assured both himself, and the fearful parents. It was a last resort, first they would try meditation, calming techniques – Merlin, even calming droughts, anything – before they tried this.

His eyes looked to the boy, so small and pale, and knew this would not be the last time he saw him, not for a long shot.

He looked up as the parents – Lily and James – were leaving, each carrying a limp child in hand.

"Oh – Mr and Mrs Potter?" he called, his quill poised over the letter he had just begun to his friend at St. Mungos.

They turned.

"Call me Felix. I have a feeling we are going to be seeing a lot of each other in the future. And Lily – congratulations." He smiled sadly at them, then returned to his paperwork.

The door closed behind them.

"Lily?" James turned to her, his eyes glittering with apprehension, sadness, worry, anticipation and – hope. "What did he mean by that?"

Lily's face broke into a weary smile; finally, some good news after so, so much bad.

February the third welcomed the third Potter child to the world; a healthy baby girl with two names, Sarah Angela. Even with a pink, wrinkled face and a head the size of his clenched fist, James could already see she would be splitting image of her mother – that is, but for her hair, a thin misting of wispy black just the same shade as Jonas' and Harry's. In comparison Jonas' features were a simple mixture between himself and Lily, while his older son's face was almost identical to his own when he was his age.

Speaking of Harry ... his eyes wandered to the stairs which led to the third floor, his face softening sadly.

Harry had never really been the same since ... that day.

When they had got home after that ... disastrous medical appointment, Lily had quickly put Jonas down for a nap, while James simply sat on the low couch, cradling his thin, sleeping son in his arms. His eyes traced the childish features over, and over, and over – committing him to memory, though why he didn't know.

"He isn't going anywhere," Lily said softly from the doorway, her slim form hovering before slowly lowering to sit beside them. "He isn't dying, he isn't sick, he's just ..."

James shook his head.

"You heard what the Hea – what Felix said," his voice was low, gravelly, catching on some syllables and breaking on others. "His magical core – forget it's too powerful, before that, he said that it's just too much for his body to handle, think Lily, it's the reason he's grown so slowly, why we were so worried when he seemed so much smaller than everyone else ... and then when he ... when he suggested we actually ... I can't ... I just couldn't do that to him, Lily, I won't–"

"Shh, love, it's alright," Lily whispered, pressing her finger to James' lips when it looked he was on the verge of breaking down. "It's going to be fine, we'll try the meditation, starting tomorrow, everything is going to be fine, alright? I promise, nothing is going to happen to Harry, to any of our children. He'll pull through this, and we'll be

there every step of the way. We're going to help him, he is going to be fine, James."

James nodded, pulled Harry closer to him and resting his forehead against the child's own, tears dripping past his round glasses – glasses he now realized Harry would never need thanks to Felix's healing – to strike Harry's sleeping face softly. He wiped them away with shaking fingers, and kissed the warm forehead softly.

"He's going to be okay," he told himself in a broken whisper, Lily pressed up to his side, her eyes too watching the slack face of their son. "You're going to be okay, Harry-bear, I promise. Daddy's here – I'm not going to let anything bad happen to you, I promise."

Lily pressed her face into James' shoulder, tears of her own beginning to fall, and James shifted one arm to wrap around her too. The three of them sat there, two watching as the third slept, wondering how they would break the news to the tiny child who would not be able to understand just yet what was happening.

"Harry-bear, there's something I want to talk to you about," Lily said lightly as she cleaned up the cheap plastic dishes the three-year-old had licked clean from jam-covered toast. She had always wondered why he was so – so unpicky about what he ate, from what she'd seen of other families, boys his age usually threw tantrums whenever you gave them something new or different – but Harry had never done that. He had always taken whatever food he was given, eaten it as if it were the last pear or mince pie on earth, and even still looked to her for more. It broke her heart when she realized this must have been a side-effect of his enormous magical core, a hunger she and James hadn't even known was there to satisfy. Merlin, how often had Harry gone hungry, even as a baby, because she or James hadn't known it?

"Yeah, Mama?" Harry bounced down from his elevated seat, his face-splitting grin revealing two rows of small milk-teeth, surrounded by smeared jam and milk.

"We're going to be doing something a little different today, Harry-bear," Lily said as she wiped his face, then her hands on a tea-towel before turning and crouching down before Harry. "It's called meditation."

"What's mediashun?" Harry frowned, trying out the new and foreign word.

"Meditation," Lily repeated the word slowly. "It's something the Healer said we have to start doing from now on, every day for about an hour or two. Do you think you can do that for me?"

"Uh huh!" Harry beamed. "'Cause we're always s'posed to do wha' the Healer tells us to do, huh Mama?"

"That's right Harry-bear," Lily smiled at him, taking his hand and leading him from the small kitchen-and-dining-room to the adjacent living room, both of them on the first floor of the apartment. The second floor up a narrow flight of stairs held a bathroom and two small bedrooms, while the third floor had the last bedroom, a second bathroom, a collapsible ladder into the peaked attic, and a small stone balcony overlooking the narrow street. If one was agile enough, they could use the balcony to scale the v-shaped roof and see as far as the stone courtyard with it's wide, shallow wishing-pond and single tree.

"So ... Mama?" Harry looked up at the red-haired woman curiously as they sat cross-legged across from each other on a thickly woven mat between their two dark-blue couches.

"Yes, Harry?"

"What is media-tayshun?"

"Meditation," Lily repeated with a laugh in her voice. "And it's where we sit – like this –" she assumed one of the few positions she'd picked up over the years, with her legs crossed Indian style and her hands resting loosely on her thighs, "-for as long as we can, breathing deeply in ... and out ... and in, thinking about nothing, but everything at the same time," Lily's voice grew quieter and calmer as she spoke, and Harry watched her strangely.

"But Mama, that sounds boring, I don't wanna–"

"Harry!" Lily snapped, before closing her eyes and repeating, "Harry-bear, please, the Healer said you have to do this, okay, it's very important and–" her voice caught, the memory of what might happen to her son still fresh in her mind. "-and please, please, can you do

this? For me? For your Mama and Daddy, please Harry?" She still couldn't believe she'd been lowered to pleading with a three-year-old.

Harry searched her face with surprising seriousness, before saying in a soft, high voice,

"Okay, Mama. If it's really, reeeeally important ..."

"It is, Harry-bear, please – trust me. Try to do it for as long as you can, okay? It doesn't matter the first few times, but one day you'll be having to do this for a very long time, so we want to have as much practice as we can, okay?"

"Okay Mama," Harry looked down and used his hands to arrange his legs into the same position as Lily's, who smiled gratefully as she watched him. Thank Merlin ...

"Like this, Mama?" Harry asked, and she looked to see him sitting with his hands resting on his knees, his eyes closed and a look of complete serenity on his angelic face.

"Just like that, Harry-bear," Lily leaned over and kissed his nose, grinning as it scrunched up adorably. "Now, try to think of nothing, okay? Or ... imagine a great, huge fluffy cloud bigger than any cloud you've ever seen in your life–"

"Wow," Harry whispered softly, and Lily's smile deepened, even while she spoke,

"-and imagine it keeps on growing and growing, before it starts moving towards you, it's so big you can't even see where it ends, and then you slowly fall into it, and it's the softest cloud you've ever touched, it cuddles in around you and it's lovely and warm, and ..." she continued for several minutes, her voice growing quieter and quieter, softer and softer until she finally trailed off, leaving Harry sitting there with an air of peace and tranquility she couldn't help but envy. Smiling down at him tiny form, she slowly drew a book out from under a cushion and opened it to the first page.

"Mama?" her son's voice broke her from her novel softly. She looked up to see almost an hour and a half had passed, and Harry was leaning forward on his hands, looking up at her curiously. She folded

the corner of her page and placed the book to one side.

"Yes, Harry-bear?"

"Why did the Healer say I have to do media-tation?"

Lily would have smiled had the question not been so serious.

"Harry ..." she and James had debated over whether or not to tell Harry, and decided that they would tell him if he asked. Suddenly – she wished he had not asked. "Harry ... when we were at the Healer's ... he cast a spell on you to see how big your magic is."

Harry nodded in understanding, knowing there was more to it than that.

"Harry-bear ... baby ... your magic is a lot, lot bigger than we thought it would be," Lily told the child softly. "It's too big for your body, and sometimes there's a chance that it might escape and - and change something. But did you know, this is one of the reasons why you eat so much, because you need more food for your magic than other people do."

"Really?" Harry tilted his head to one side, his hair – falling about half-way to his shoulders – hanging limply. "But ... um ... what does that mean?"

"It means, Harry," Lily leant forward to caress his bare arm comfortingly. "It means you're too powerful. It means you need to do meditation every day so that you don't loose control of all the magic you have inside of you."

"Why?"

"Oh, Harry," Lily finally succumbed to the urge, and moved so she could scoop Harry into her lap and cradle him gently. "Because we don't want you to be hurt, that's why," she whispered into his hair. "If you loose control, you could break something or - or someon-" She broke off jarringly, praying he hadn't heard her, but as always with children Harry's age, he surprised her with his perceptiveness of things he shouldn't have heard.

"I could ... hurt someone?" he spoke in a voice smaller than any she'd ever heard from him before. His fragile body tensed, and she pressed him closer in a vain attempt to smother that pain from him, something she knew she just couldn't do.

Merlin ... "Harry-bear ... yes, Harry," her voice – and her heart – was breaking, but Harry had to know this, he had to understand, "you could loose control of your magic and – and you might hurt someone, okay baby, so I need you to do this for me–"

"You mean I could- but, but what about you, and Daddy, and Jo?" Harry leapt from her lap, staring at her in subdued horror – or, as much horror as a three year old could comprehend.

"No, Harry," Lily said firmly. "You won't hurt us, I know you won't. We trust you Harry, and we love you so much. You will never hurt us, Daddy and I know you won't."

"But I–"

"Harry, trust me," she met his eyes – almost identical to her own – softly. "The meditation Healer Felix asked you to do will stop you from ever hurting anyone, including Jo and Daddy."

"And you?"

Lily smiled. "And me too."

Harry sniffed shortly, Lily wiping one of the stray tears that had glistened on his cheek.

"Mama ... how long do I have to media-tation for until I won't hurt anybody?"

"Oh, Harry, you won't hurt us, this is just – a precaution."

"What's a pr ..."

"We're just making sure, okay sweetie?" Lily carded her fingers through his mop of hair briefly. "And ... I don't know how long, but we'll be going to see Healer Felix in a few weeks once he's had a chance to talk to some of his friends, and he can tell us then, okay Harry-bear?"

"Okay Mama," Harry smiled, wrapping his small arms around her waist and hugging as tight as his slight form could manage. Lily cradled him gently in return, kissing his hair and closing her eyes against the pain of knowledge.

She would have much rather remained ignorant of this particular truth.

Baby Sarah was a quieter bundle than Jonas had been, though her inquisitive eyes – green just as Harry's were – were as active as ever, and she was constantly gurgling, mumbling or chattering away to herself in a language no one but her could understand. Jonas, who had begun toddling around in an unsteady walk during the second trimester of Lily's pregnancy, was curious about the newest addition to the family, and even Harry was – to an extent – happy.

The two brothers were often seen sitting on the soft mat, watching or playing with the small bundle supported in a wire-frame, portable cradle. Jonas was on the verge of speech, with Harry often encouraging him and egging him on, eager for a fellow youngster to play with.

However, this joy and wonder Sarah had brought to the Potter home was somewhat subdued, in the knowledge that on the same day they had learnt of Lily's pregnancy, they had also learnt of Harry's condition.

Harry had been true to his word, and followed Felix's advice as closely as someone of his age and intelligence could. It had now become a habit for him to rise, eat with his mother, father and brother (Sarah having been fed earlier), then move to the bedroom on the third floor, a room that he and Jonas shared while Sarah slept in the small room beside their parents' on the second floor.

Once in his room, Harry would settle himself on his slightly sagging bed, close his eyes, and meditate. At first, he had required Lily's help to reach and maintain the required level of peace and stillness, though now after nearly seven months he was finally getting the hang of it, and in the true independence of a nearly-four year old, he demanded that he was capable of meditating by himself.

Healer Felix, too, had kept his promise, and called the Potters into the medical unit two months after their initial meeting. He revealed that his peers and friends had been flummoxed at the idea presented to them, and gave the only advice he had, and had given them before; meditation, calming droughts, or a final resort of a channelling. Lily and James had been disappointed, but understood that there was nothing he could do. Instead, they had taken the small supply of potions the hospital had been sending them weekly – nutritional potions for Harry, along with a handful of calming droughts (varying in strength) just in case – and thanked him for his time.

Since then, the Potters and Felix had been meeting fortnightly, Felix measuring Harry's magical core and monitoring his body weight, even creating a self-updating chart for the family to take with them and compare with. These meetings briefly expanded into check-ups on Lily during her pregnancy, however Felix always made sure to check up on Harry as well, casting spells to show his historical status in terms of stress, emotion or magical energy – a concept much different from a magical core.

A magical core was, essentially, the potential a witch or wizard contained. It was the absolute maximum of magic they held in their bodies, it was constantly present, the raw source of all accidental magic, and it did not change at all over the course of their lives; in this regard, Harry was the one and only exception.

Magical energy, however, was the quantity of the magical core that was consciously accessible. At a young age, this was very small, however it grew over time, the fastest growth in the period between eleven and thirteen – it was for this reason that the majority of official magical educations started here. Magical energy did not add to the magical core, but was rather a percentage of the magical core that grew over time, and converted this core to magic that was usable in day-to-day spells.

Most wizards never unlocked all of their magical core, much in the way humans did not use all of their brain, however the few that did, had worked for years and decades, sometimes centuries, to achieve this. The most recent wizard to achieve a completely accessible magical core was Albus Dumbledore – not even Voldemort had reached his full potential before his demise, and that in itself was a truly frightening thought.

One afternoon, after waving the Potter family from his office, Felix thought on this theory. Harry had, at this time, the usual limited conscious access to his magical core. However, should his growth follow the average bell curve, even the weakest percentage of magical energy derived from his core would render him a powerful wizard, unusually so. It wasn't often that truly powerful wizards were born to places such as Were; more often than not, wizards such as Dumbledore or Grindelwald were born to rich, noble, pureblooded families who wouldn't be caught dead in such a destitute place as Were. Very few wizards from the magical equivalent of slums ever became great or famous.

Harry ... you were meant for greater things than this, Felix mourned briefly. He had grown fond of the young boy and his family, and his heart truly went out to them and their situation. You deserve better than the life fate has dealt you.

Sighing, Felix shot a spell at the door, indicating to the lonely receptionist that he was ready for his next appointment.

Whatever the next few years held ... with Harry there – they could be sure to be interesting.

Commentary: Muse and Culture

Around about here I started watching 'The Familiar of Zero' for inspiration. It's basically Harry Potter sexed up and in the obligatorily dramatic anime style. Well worth watching - if you're not squeamish about nearly-naked girls and a perverted version of Dumbledore, that is.

The reason I've brought this up is that social order in The Familiar of Zero, I found, to be very similar to the social order in this fanfiction. In The Familiar of Zero, those who are capable of magic attend a very prestigious school and are known as "Nobles." Those incapable of magic are "Plebeians," or commoners. The social order in Those Less Worthy is much the same; to attend Hogwarts is to be great, to not attend Hogwarts means you must be lacking either magically or financially, and therefore be inferior.

The students of Hogwarts in my fanfiction will be rather stuck up, and look down on those from other schools or social status. Imagine the way Purebloods look down on Muggleborns, then apply that attitude to all the students towards those who are not students. It's probably the only time you'd ever find Draco and Hermione agreeing on something. Naturally, this segregation becomes more profound the older the students become, until it becomes a universally accepted fact no matter their social background.

This will, of course, be played most dramatically later in the plot, as I'm sure you can imagine.

Chapter Three: Withdraw

Over time, a noticeable change was to be seen in the Potter household. There were the more prominent changes – Jonas finally joining the ranks of the verbally literate, Sarah learning to crawl and smile, the conception of the soon-to-be fourth child of Lily and James Potter – but one change that was not so easily seen or spotted was the change in one Harry James Potter, the eldest son, the heir to a Ancient and Noble House who were reduced to little more than a lower class family.

The knowledge of the power within him – the knowledge that he was not normal, the knowledge that he could hurt someone, should he ever grow angry or upset or hurt enough – had changed him. It had taken it's time, sure, but the change was there.

He became withdrawn from his family, preferring to meditate in his room and purge his mind of the emotions that threatened to topple his fragile balance, than mingle with his slowly growing family in the now cramped living room. During meals he was verbal enough, make no mistake, and there was nothing he loved more than spending a sleepy winter afternoon in the living room, curled up at his mother's side listening to her read books from a limp second-hand story book, watching as she rocked Sarah and grinning at the antics of his crazy little brother.

But, eventually, the truth would come rocking back, that knowledge, that he could hurt them ... and he had to leave.

His mother and father sat him down often, told him how they missed him on those days he barely left his room. They told him how they would never blame him if anything did happen, how they trusted that nothing would happen in the first place, how they knew the meditation helped and that he had his artificially enhanced magical core under control – but there was still that undercurrent that ran through the room whenever Harry entered it, there was still that look Harry had in his eyes that dulled the joy in him.

When Harry finally turned five and it was time for him to begin his attendance at the local school – Were First School for the Magically Inclined, W.F.S for the children too young to piece together the mouthful – Lily and James nearly cried in relief. Finally, a chance for Harry to socialize, to meet children his own age, to make friends and

bring out the mischievous side they all knew he hid beneath his shy and quiet appearance.

The birth of Harry's second brother – the fourth, and, they finally decided, last Potter child – had, briefly, lit a spark in the child's eyes. As the boy two months shy of his fifth birthday sat in the hospital bedside chair and cradled the tiny bundle gently, they saw raw emotion on his youthful face they hadn't seen in months, since the day they had revealed his inner self to him. For the next several weeks – during the whole of the next appointment with Felix, during the social gathering Lily arranged with some of the other mothers in the area, during the times they visited the park and he ran through the pitted bark playground freely – all he would speak of was his little brother Andrew Mark, the first of the Potter children born with his mother's auburn locks and freckles, and the "cutest thing ever" according to his oldest sibling.

But that fleeting excitement had soon dampened, and by the time school was due to start a mere four months later, Harry was back to usual, reclusive self.

Space in the Potter household, another serious matter that often graced the minds of Lily and James, was becoming an increasingly difficult matter. With the handful of galleons James earned weekly from the owner and manager of the store he worked, and the enormous amount they'd paid upon first moving into the area with the money from the sale of their two-roomed cottage in Godric's Hollow, they had almost accomplished in repaying the mortgage on apartment 16C of Brucklebow Eastern Lane. They had grown to like the narrow, if cramped home. With Harry and Jonas in the bedroom on the third floor, Lily and James in the master bedroom of the second floor and Sarah with Andrew in the third bedroom beside theirs, they could just barely fit them all in. Barely.

James and Lily had briefly considered moving, but just couldn't bring themselves to. The house had a lived-in feel about it, the notches on the archway between the kitchen and living room defining the growth of their various children, the whiter-than-usual place on the narrow hallway wall where Harry had escaped with the non-acidic paints in his toddler years. The chips in the windowsill where more than one chair or toy had been thrown against it, the drapes and childish pictures adorning the walls, memoirs detailing the history of their growing family.

They couldn't leave this place. Even the neighbors were friendly, from the single witch Kathy making her way in the world to the mysterious Devon and his male, were-wolf partner they'd had round for tea once or twice. Were had caught them in its web, it had ensnared them, and now they couldn't imagine in their wildest dreams leaving the old, dark, cramped city they called home.

This was just the way things were. And there was nothing wrong with that, Lily thought decidedly as she waved Harry and James goodbye, off to drop the boy on his first day of school.

This was just the way things were ...

Harry was seven years old when his name was removed from the Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry attendance register.

It killed them inside to do it, it really did, and Lily and James had held on as long as they could – but they just couldn't make it.

Any savings they had set aside for the boy's school fees had been slowly, but surely drawn out – for the countless potions Harry had been prescribed over the years, for the countless medical appointments they'd attended, for the births of first Jonas, then Sarah, then Andrew, until there was barely enough galleons left for a wand, let alone the books, the robes, tuition fees, board fees, Merlin, they doubted they could even afford the train ride over.

But now, sitting Harry down at the chipped dining table one weekend as his siblings ran rampant in the room next door, it was time to face the facts.

They couldn't afford to send Harry to Hogwarts.

That was just the way things were.

Harry wasn't angry at his parents; really, he wasn't. He loved them more than anything, they had done and given up so much for him, he couldn't bear to hate them. But ... was it alright if he felt just a little bit ... peeved off?

The moment the awkward, short conversation was done, Harry excused himself to his and Jonas' room and ran up the narrow

staircase with skilled ease born from one having grown up running up and down those staircases. The moment he was in the olive-green painted room, he threw himself on his bed and buried his head in the pillow, clenching his eyes and desperately trying to calm himself down before-

Before something bad happened.

Memory flooded back, and suddenly Harry was fighting the emotions rising in him, fighting a long, constant battle he was all too familiar in raging. He had to stop this – this emotion that rose in him before something happened. He couldn't let anything happen; not when it had been so good for so long. He couldn't.

Thankfully, it didn't take long before he was back to his usual, calm, collected, non-exploding self.

Alright. It was time to look at this logically, the way Felix had always taught him to when he went in for their sessions every few weeks. Detach from the situation, observe as an outsider, consider the possibilities, then reflect. It was the only way he knew he could look at this situation – any situation – without getting hurt. Or hurting somebody else.

Deep breaths. Deep, deep breaths, you're used to this, see, your body remembers doesn't it? His heart – racing for one of the very few times in his life – calmed in a fashion that would be insignificant in any other, yet was dramatic in him. The subtle coiling in the pit of his rib cage – an almost tangible tensing of muscles that didn't exist, his magical core subtly flexing its presence – eased gently.

And finally, he looked on the situation with half-lidded, emerald green eyes.

So they weren't going to send him to Hogwarts.

So what?

Really – what was the big deal? None of his classmates were going to Hogwarts – he doubted Vienna's parents could afford the outrageous fees, and there was no way Karl and Zane's dad could send them either. Anyway, from what he'd heard from the older kids, Hogwarts was just a snooty place for stuck up Purebloods – not the

Purebloods like he or Vienna was, but real Purebloods who lived in mansions and stuff – to get pampered by what was rumored to be over a hundred house elves. Harry couldn't stop his eyes from widening just ever-so-slightly every time he heard that. What in the name of Merlin could one school do with a hundred house elves? What his mum would give for even one house elf! ...

But, that wasn't the point. Harry sighed, and twisted his hands softly in the sheets. It didn't matter whether his friends were going to Hogwarts or not, really. What mattered – what his Dad had always told him mattered – was education. Learning how to use the magic he possessed.

While this was, understandably, important for all magical persons ... it was especially important for Harry. With the experience magical education brought Witches and Wizards, it also helped them harness the magical core and convert it into the concept of magical energy Felix had described to him one time. Changing accidental magic into non-accidental magic. Changing subconscious, into conscious.

Changing his controlled, emotionless life ... into one full of possibilities.

He needed to learn to control his magical core; he needed that education, more than anything.

It was the only way he knew he would ever have anything close to a normal life.

Dad had eventually told him that they would deal with that necessary change when the time came. There weren't any magical schools in Were for kids after the age of eleven – not only was it extremely expensive to register with the Ministry for authorization to teach and hold those official exams, but frankly, half the teenagers who qualified for such a school wouldn't attend anyway. More often than not, teenagers in the Were found employment as early as thirteen, commonly in a family business working in the back or as a teller, and simply didn't have the time to study for a qualification they had no guarantee of achieving in the first place. After all, those in Were were often there for a reason – be it lacking in finance, magical ability or intelligence, there was always some factor that kept them

here, away from the riches the rest of the magical world held for them.

Harry let the frayed fabric run through his pale fingers as he thought through the situation calmly. Just like he'd been taught to do.

"So ... either Dad gets out a loan, and I do go to Hogwarts ... like that'll ever happen ... or I'm gonna have to be home-schooled." His voice bore only the barest of fluctuations in tone or emotion, something he often lamented about, but had decided he had little control over. Perhaps as time went on, he could express more of that happiness and content he allowed himself to be overcome with every now and then ... perhaps with time, he could master the expressions of emotion and care he was too far gone to ever truly allow himself to feel ...

With a mental shake to dislodge the creeping thoughts, Harry snapped back to the present. He really wasn't sure what he felt about how things had turned out. He had heard of the few "unlucky" souls in the Were who, at the insistence of their parents, studied for their own OWLs and NEWTs after First School. There were rumors that went round about them, myths and legends of the greasy-haired teenagers who were locked in their rooms and forced to study, even when they wanted to go outside or down to the courtyard or hang out in Manny's yard, they couldn't because their parents forced them to stay and read boring books all day ...

Secretly, as he folded himself into the well-practiced pose he usually held for meditation, Harry's last thought before sweet oblivion was that he really, really hoped Frankie had been joking as he told them that story over lunch.

One full year after Harry was pulled from the 'attending Hogwarts' list, and it was Jonas' turn for his first day at school. Harry held the younger's hand as he was dragged along, while James followed behind them with a doting smile on his face. Harry had Jonas' hand firmly in his own as he expertly wove his way through the steep, narrow, unique alleyways. The five-year-old was in the zone as he babbled about the joys and games and friends he was anticipating at W.F.S., and Harry could only listen to his smallest brother with shining, happy eyes.

Jonas adored Harry, just like Sarah and Andrew did, and Harry adored them back ... though at times, the atmosphere between the three youngest siblings could get a little ... tense. Harry, being older than the others by a relatively larger amount – a full three years between Harry and Jonas, with a mere one year between Jonas', Sarah's and Andrew's births – meant he was the "big brother" of the lot, the one they all looked up to. Even though he often detached himself from them, slinking back to his room to meditate or sip at the calming droughts Felix gave him in case of emergencies, the times he did spend with them were cherished, beautiful times.

There was the time Mum and Dad had taken them out of Were during his winter holidays, to one of the Muggle National Parks, and he and Mum had skated across one of the frozen ponds while Dad held Andrew and made sure Jonas and Sarah didn't smother each other in the snow drifts.

Then there had been that time when he borrowed the book of Muggle fairy tales from the library, and had showed off his reading skills to the three of them. They had spent the whole afternoon cuddled on the two-seater couch, Harry in the middle of them reading the wonders of Snow White, Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty aloud. None of them had been aware of Lily standing in the doorway, taking discrete pictures with the disposable camera, nor of James grinning as he returned from work to see them sleeping in one, warm bundle on the sofa, the book dangling from Harry's limp hands.

For all that it might not show at times, for all that he often, for no apparent reason, would run from the room and not be seen again for the rest of the night – for all of those faults and let-downs and silent moments, Harry loved his family, more than anything he knew.

He loved the way Jonas would always, without fail, no matter how out of sorts they might be with each other and no matter what fight or mishap or tragedy might have befallen then, whisper goodnight to him from across their dark bedroom floor. He loved how Sarah, with her black shoulder-length hair, who resembled him greatest out of all the siblings, would kiss his cheek when he came down for breakfast, before dumping half a glass of water over his head and laughing at his sodden expression. He loved how Andrew, little Andrew who was only three years old, would stretch himself as high as he could when Mum measured them, trying to reach Harry's seemingly impossible height and crying every time he didn't, until Harry

reassured him quietly that, when he was his age, he would be even taller than Harry was.

He loved the way Andrew would blink up at him, then, with Dad's hazel eyes set in a face so similar to his own, grin broadly before marching into the lounge to tell Mum loudly how he was going to be taller than Harry, one day.

That's why he was always going to be there for them. That's why he was always going to protect them. That's why he would do everything in his power, everything he could, to keep them safe and watch over them, like Mum had told him to do that morning when she packed his and Jonas' bags.

Because he loved them.

He didn't need any more reason than that.

With the spacing of their birthdays set as such, Harry and Andrew only shared one year of school together before it was time for Harry to graduate from Were's First School. Ten years old – turning eleven in just two month's time – and Harry had already run the course of all official education Were had to offer.

It was a sad time to see go, even though he knew his friends and classmates would still be there, just around the corner, still hanging out at the fountain every other Saturday, still running on the rooftops before their parents caught them and dragged them back home by their ears. But the experience of sitting in cheap wooden desks, whispering and passing notes, all the things he had come to enjoy about school, they'd be gone now.

Of all his classmates, all forty of them, only two of them were leaving for Hogwarts – Blaise Zabini, the dark-skinned son of a local brothel owner Mrs Zabini (no-one knew her first name but for Blaise, as the story went, and Blaise certainly wasn't telling), and Morag McDougal, a small yet stout girl who was the daughter of a property manager and his thin wife who according to local gossip, was called in from time to time to model for Witch Weekly.

Harry wasn't particularly close to either of them, though he and Blaise had spoken a few times during a research assignment on natural disasters in their second to last year, and had sat together a

handful of times since. He wouldn't be sad to see Morag go – Merlin knew Were would be better off without that gluttony of a girl – though he would miss Blaise's dry humor when he left for the mysterious world Hogwarts had become.

A world he would never know.

"Write to me," Harry called softly after Blaise as he and his mother made their last rounds of the streets. Blaise was to be leaving the next morning for the train to take them to Scotland – it was the last time they would see him until he returned for the Christmas holidays that December. "Tell me what I'm missing out on!"

Blaise waved absently over his shoulder, and Harry knew he wouldn't write, but he didn't mind. He would hunt him down when he came home, and make him tell him all about the castle he knew, in his heart, he would never see, but that was apparently among the most beautiful sights to behold in the wizarding world.

Sighing, Harry retreated into the apartment and gave a small, unpracticed smile to James, who was home for the weekend and was playing with Andrew and Sarah. Jonas was ... somewhere, probably their room, Harry discretely rolled his eyes. Jonas had been curious about Harry's strange hobby of sitting completely still for hours on end, something Harry couldn't imagine the hyper eight year old managing for even five minutes. Jonas was so different than Harry had been at his age, he had often heard James commenting on it to Mum when they thought he wasn't listening.

"You okay, Harry my man?" James called from the living room. Harry started from where he had been standing absently in the tiny entrance hall – which was nothing more than a place to put the stairs, really – and called back,

"Yeah, Dad, I'm fine ..."

"Harry?" Lily descended from where she had been tidying up Sarah and Andrew's room. "Why are you back so early, I thought you and Vienna were going to Manny's for the afternoon."

"We were, but I wanted to say goodbye to Blaise, and ..."

Lily's face softened, and she walked over to give her oldest son a short, compassionate hug. Harry leant into the embrace carefully, then tore gently away; it was so uncool to be hugging your parents when you were as old as he was.

"Are you okay, sweetie?" Lily asked, slipping two fingers under Harry's chin and tilting his face towards hers.

"I'm fine, Mum," Harry insisted, though Lily could see the hidden regret in Harry's eyes, and immediately knew where it had come from. She sighed, and crouched down so she was on level with the short boy – the nutritional potions in his younger years might have helped eliminate the seemingly insatiable hunger, but they had done nothing for her child's height.

"Harry-bear," Harry's cheeks hinted a blush at the old nickname she hadn't used in years, "you know if we could have, we would've sent you there ... but it's just too expensive, we don't have that kind of money." She brushed the shoulder-length hair from his face and tucked it behind his ear gently. "Now that Andrew's in school, I can try to find a job, and with two working parents we should be able to scrape enough money together to send at least one of you to Hogwarts ... but Harry, we just don't have that kind of money right now."

"I understand, Mum, really, I do ..." Harry looked in his mother's eyes, and couldn't bear the pain he saw there. "I don't mind being home-schooled ... at least this way, I don't have to leave you guys for nine months of the year."

Lily smiled sadly at her son's bravery – definitely a Gryffindor – trying to protect her from pain she had inflicted on herself, and kissed his forehead soundly.

"Oh, thanks for reminding me, Harry," she said, rising from the ground and grinning down at his suddenly apprehensive face cheekily. "Your first set of course work was owled in just this morning, and I know that you're dying to get started on it ..."

"On second thoughts, maybe I will go hang out with Vienna," Harry was quick to backtrack, wheeling around and wrenching the thick wooden door open. "I'll be home by dark!" he called over his shoulder before disappearing from sight.

Lily chuckled at the sighs of his mop of black hair bobbing down the road, disappearing into one of the smaller alleyways between apartments 12 and 13, and wandered into the living room. James had Andrew in a tight hold, upside down with blood rushing to the laughing child's face. Lily crossed her arms and tapped her foot loudly, waiting for the middle-aged man to notice her.

His face jerked up guiltily, and he quickly set Andrew down on the ground again, ignoring his pleas not to stop.

"Erm – I can explain?" he asked feebly. Lily couldn't help but laugh at the deer-caught-in-headlights expression, and swooped in to 'save' Andrew from the wicked man.

Sarah, meanwhile, jumped on the sofa and shrieked gleefully as James began to tickle her, clutching his shoulders and laughing until her cheeks hurt.

Harry watched them all from his place on the roof opposite them, smiling, suddenly grateful he wasn't going to Hogwarts.

It would have been nothing short of torture to have to leave all of them behind.

There was, however, one treasure Lily and James knew they could not, would not, would never deny any of their children.

And that was a wand.

Wands cost from as low as five sickles – second hand – to over seven galleons for the highly crafted works of art. They had dithered and hummed and hawed for almost three weeks over whether to purchase Harry a second-hand, or brand new wand, and finally decided to take the young, inquisitive eleven-year-old to Ollivanders' the next Tuesday, when the children would be in school and James could beg off work for a day. So, delving into savings they usually kept aside for emergencies, James grabbed Harry's shoulders firmly, and at about ten that morning apparated them to Diagon Alley. It would be Harry's first trip to the famous alley and James' first return since he and Lily left central London all those years ago.

Harry had – understandably – been excited beyond belief; the only thing that kept his room from becoming the newest bomb-site was one of his longest meditations in years, and half a bottle of a mild calming potion he kept in his bedside drawer. It was a new place – he and his brothers and sister rarely left Were, what with their parents being so busy with work most of the time – and he always enjoyed seeing new places and names. He looked around the open street, silently marveling at the wasted space with such broad roads and footpaths, then followed after his father as they hurried to the upward-sloped end of the street. His eyes wandered from witch to wizard to witch, eyes snagging on the clearly-expensive clothes and simply outrageous prices displayed on sandwich boards and signs. Three sickles for a horned slug? You could get them for ten knuts at Hela's store on Central Road ... honestly, these rich types, wasting money like there was no tomorrow ...

The store James stopped at looked just as old, inherited, and rich as the others – Ollivanders, Makers of Fine Wands since 382 B.C., according to the painted and chipped sign.

Harry sighed - a common habit his parents were constantly trying to pry from him, to no avail - as his fingers tingled in distant anticipation, and allowed his father to take his hand when they entered the storefront.

"What's this? It's a bit late for Hogwarts students, isn't it?"

An old man's voice rasped from the rear of the store, and Harry resisted the urge to jump, years of training keeping his heart and breathing steady as he pressed into his father's side. It wasn't often he met strangers – living in such a small town, where everyone knew everyone – but this man was particularly creepy looking, if he were to be honest with himself. Which he almost always was.

"Oh no, Harry here won't be going to Hogwarts this year," the sadness in James' voice was evident, as was the regret shining in his eyes, and Ollivander tactfully dropped the matter, realizing he had put his foot in it from the first moment and backtracking wildly – it wouldn't do to drive off any potential customers, would it?

"So ... a wand, I presume ..." Ollivander's eyes finally alighted on James, and narrowed in thought before suddenly lighting up in recognition. "No ... James?"

James looked up from where he had been watching Harry closely, and met Ollivander's bright eyes, startled.

"You ... remember me?"

"I remember every wand I ever sold, my boy – mahogany, eleven inches, am I correct?"

"Of course," James drew the slender, dark wand from its place in his robes. "Excellent for –"

"-Transfiguration, yes I haven't forgotten a thing, my boy," Ollivander looked ... excited, if such a thing could be said of a man obviously their senior by several hundred years. "Now – onto, Harry, was it?"

"Yep, Harry James – my oldest, you know," the pride in James' voice was almost tangible, and Harry visibly grew taller under the praise, smiling up at his father happily.

"Oldest? You have more?" Ollivander asked as he moved towards the nearest pile of towering wand boxes.

"Yes, four children – three boys and my little girl Sarah. I guess you'll be seeing me again in a few year's time," James smiled, watching as Harry was presented with his first wand and laughing as the gentle swish resulted in a thick stream of oozing, indefinable liquid pouring over Ollivander's crisply ironed robes.

"Wonderful," Ollivander's voice muffled through the layer of sludge, and with a wave of his wand the clean wand maker was off to find another wand – a wand that would most definitely not be dragon heartstring.

After almost fifty wands, Harry's slender fingers finally, finally wrapped around one long, smooth wand that warmed under his fingers. His eyes must have shown his excitement, because Ollivander paused from where he had been automatically moving for the next wand, and walked back to stand beside Harry, motioning for him to 'give it a wave.'

Harry waved it hesitantly, and smiled when a thick beam of golden-blue light trailed from its end, curling in the air and wafting around him in comforting waves.

"Eleven inches – you do take after your father, don't you my boy? - Holly, with a core of unicorn horn. If I remember correctly, that particular specimen willingly gave his horn to my great-uncle. A very pure wand, I doubt you will ever be able to cast truly dark spells – not that you'd be wanting to, of course," Ollivander laughed nervously, glancing at James who was watching him with a raised eyebrow.

"That'll be five galleons." James, whose own wand had cost seven galleons, cast a questioning gaze at Ollivander as he counted the thick, heavy coins out. "Unicorn parts are a lot cheaper than phoenix tail feathers, my boy," Ollivander explained with a chuckle as he handed the boxed wand over.

"Thanks," James said sincerely, tucking the slim box into his robe pocket and laughing at the put-out look on Harry's face, knowing the eleven year old had wanted to hold it - but, perhaps it was best for now that he kept it until Harry was ready ... just in case. "I guess I'll be seeing you again in a few years time."

"Until next time, James," Ollivander waved them off, moving to throw the galleons into his till and pack the unsold wands away.

"Right, Harry," James said once they were out on the idling street. "We still have two galleons left – your mother and I thought the wand would be a bit more expensive than it was – so how about we stop off at Martha's bookstore on the way home and get a few textbooks to start you off with for this year?"

"Alright!" Harry allowed himself a brief lapse in control, dancing to his father's side and dragging him down the street enthusiastically. Unseen by him, James' face softened wonderfully; he loved it whenever Harry deemed it safe to allow his true emotions free, and cherished every second of it.

This was – officially, in Harry's opinion – the best day ever.

Commentary: Changes from Canon

A reminder for all of you – Sirius Black never "betrayed" the Potters, and was appointed as the Professor for Defense Against the Dark Arts for two years in a row due to a lack of Drama, thus breaking the curse on the position. He remains the Defense Against the Dark Arts Professor to this day. Therefore: the Philosopher's Stone was never in danger; Neville and Ron entered the Chamber alone, without Lockheart who was never a teacher in the first place; third year was probably as normal as it was ever gonna get; the plot to resurrect Voldemort via Crouch staging as Moody had a rather large setback, and was thus delayed; the Triwizard Cup went as planned with no deaths, no Unforgivables, and no fourth wizard; the Mighty Umbitch was never in power; Sirius – who was never the godfather of either Neville or Harry in the first place – never died, because the Ministry never happened; and the students of Hogwarts are a lot better prepared for the upcoming war – when Voldemort eventually gets around to returning, that is. As for Pettigrew ... well, we'll get to that later. No point in giving away everything, is there?

And in case you were wondering why Harry got a different wand than in Canon (because I know I'll be getting a comment or two about that ...):

For the adventures of the Golden Trio that remain – imagine Neville taking Harry's place, and let's leave it at that. Neville is now the best friend of Hermione and Ron, a Defense Against the Dark Arts genius and has the Horcrux scar linking him to Voldemort – so, it makes sense that he will have the brother wand of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. On an unrelated note, seeing as Neville was raised by a loving grandmother rather than magic-hating relatives, I can imagine he'll be a lot less angsty about the whole thing than Harry was.

Chapter Four: Acceptance

Three and a half years later, and things were beginning to look up for the Potter household.

Jonas, for all that he was hyper, inattentive, chatty, fun-loving and school-hating, had – to the complete amazement and befuddlement of his parents and older brother – managed to score himself an apprenticeship.

Apprenticeships were extremely rare, especially in Were, and allocated by pure luck, simply being in the right place at the right time – not to mention that for one Master, there was only ever one person meant to be their chosen Apprentice. For every Potions or Transfiguration Master, there was only one person ever meant to be their rightful student; it was finding that person that meant almost ninety percent of those apprentices were never found, and would never know of what they could have become.

Over the years, with what little resources he could find, Jonas had displayed an unusual skill in Herbology, growing and managing small plants at the First School, in the back of the sparse park, even in small wooden trays on the balcony, where plants and flowers had thought to be unable to survive. Lily and James had noted on this, but thought little of it beyond parental pride; thinking that Jonas, like Harry, was meant for a less bountiful life than the one he should have been given.

To their surprise, however, a local graduate – a brown-haired woman in her early thirties – had recently relocated to Were to study the long-term effects of highly condensed magic on specialized herbs, when she had come across the small, but impossible garden Jonas had created in the back of Were's singular park. Amazed, she had inquired into the boy, and three months after Jonas' last day of W.F.S., he was apprenticed to the well-learned woman, running to her home every day but Sunday, learning all about the plants they loved and cherished together.

Louise Pomfrey, the cousin of Hogwarts' skilled Healer, was soon a regular guest in the Potter home, visiting for lunch or afternoon talks of Jonas' progress in learning to live and breathe the lives of plants. In the true spirit of young boys, Jonas wasn't afraid of getting a little dirt under his fingernails – if anything, he welcomed it – and as such,

had been tasked to doing most of the dirty work in Louise's indoor garden.

It wasn't the education Jonas would have had at Hogwarts, had he been able to attend, but in some ways, it was better; he studied nothing but Herbology – although he did learn some of the simpler charms and spells to care for them with the second-hand wand Lily had taken him to buy the week after his apprenticeship was announced – and this gave him a chance to study the broad subject in far more detail than a mere one or two hours a day the elite school would have given him.

Harry's own studies were progressing well, too. The now fourteen year old was up-to-date in most of his chosen subjects, with the aid of his mother in Potions, Charms and History of Magic, and his father helping him to perfect Defense Against the Dark Arts and Transfiguration. Jonas would often sit with him during the nights, talking about Herbology, so Harry was certainly not lacking in that regard. And young Sarah, who had developed a keen appreciation for Runes and Ancient Languages, just like her mother, would chatter non-stop from dawn 'till dusk of them, until Harry – who couldn't help but listen – was just about bored to tears.

Harry had thrown together a standard routine which allowed him the freedom to do as he wished most of the day, but still keep to the high standards his parents expected of him in his magical studies. After meditating for an hour before and after breakfast, he would spend the next four or so hours of the day – from Monday to Saturday – studying in his room, before venturing down to the empty living room to practice wandwork for an hour or two. By then, Vienna and Zane would be out of their family-run shops and workplaces, and the three of them would loiter around the suburbs waiting for Karl to be released from his and Zane's father's drawing room.

Karl – unlike his smaller and fraternal twin, Zane – had chosen, as Harry had, to continue his studies past First School, but spent longer hours than Harry did with his father studying for the exams sent from the Ministry yearly. Karl and Harry would often walk the narrow, winding streets bouncing facts and theories off one another, while Vienna and Zane walked behind them sharing amused, but tolerant looks.

The four of them had been tentative friends over their years at First School – with Harry's ever-reclusive manner, he had found it unusually hard to open himself to children who were so, so different to him – but just as the last year had come to a close, they had finally grown as close as they were ever going to become; Vienna with her hobbies of weaving coloured threads, Karl and his prized snorfle-bug collection, Zane never pausing in his monologue of the most recent successes of Quidditch ... and Harry, who would listen to them all with a serene look on his face as he quietly revealed a little more of himself every day, blossoming under their attention as he began to slowly, carefully, reach tentative hands into the limits his abnormality set for him.

All three of Harry's closest friends were aware of his unique circumstance, and ever since learning of it Vienna had carried in her shoulder bag a small supply of calming droughs from Lily, just in case. They'd only ever needed to use them once, but they'd all seen what he was capable of, and although they'd never admit it, they feared what would happen if the day ever came when they couldn't calm their dangerous friend in time.

Vienna was a thin girl – most children in the Were were thin, a harsh reality they were all aware of, yet ignored politely – with limp brown hair and bland grey eyes, and she would certainly never be a model, but she had a bouncy, if cynical, personality which outshone her common features and never failed to bring a smile to her male friends' faces.

Karl, the older of the two twins, took after his and Zane's father, with short-cropped, dirty blonde hair and wary walnut eyes, olive skin from his grandmother's side of the family. Zane, on the other hand, had hair a shade darker and a lot longer – almost as long as Harry's, whose hair just surpassed his shoulders – and eyes to match their dead mother's in a clear, crystal blue. His skin, too, was a pleasant, olive shade that off-set his eyes and brought the mischievous glint in them to light. Karl had always been the more serious of the two, being older by a full hour and a half.

The twins, unlike Harry and Vienna, were technically of "lower" blood status – both parents being muggleborn, not a drop of Noble or Ancient blood in them, something the two 'purebloods' often playfully teased them about.

The four of them were often found trolling the streets of Were for hours, sometimes talking, sometimes just laying on the rooftop of whoever's home they stopped on and staring up at the shifting sky – day or night, rain or sunshine. Vienna's job in her aunt's cheap diner restricted the hours she spent with them on weekends and weekday mornings, but she tried to be there with them as often as she could – to quote her own words, she wouldn't miss out on the times with them for the world.

Zane's own employment was actually similar to Harry's father's job, casting simple spells and transfigurations for a crafter who was beginning to get a little old to do so himself. That had always been Zane's forte, even before he was given his mother's old wand and finally allowed to perform controlled magic. Zane had always had a sublime ability to make anything out of anything, a skill he had tried to share with Harry and the others, to no avail. Needless to say, Harry's father and Zane got on brilliantly on the days he and his twin stayed for dinner.

Harry sighed as he finally laid down his ruffled quill, the tip looking dull but a bit too short to be cut again. He was of half a mind to ask Mum for some of the muggle pens and pencils she brought home sometimes. Not only were they cheaper, but they were a lot easier to maintain, not to mention far easier to write with.

The mock test he had just completed was the last of the practice ones his father had set for him in preparation for the upcoming end-of-year exams. It was just entering February now, and he had been scheduled to visit the Ministry in early March for his exams to pass the Fourth Year of magical education.

Then, the fun would really begin. OWLs.

Shaking his head, Harry pushed the pile of paper – which was much cheaper than parchment, by far – to be marked by Lily when she returned from the receptionist's job she'd secured with the goblins, at the small local branch of Gringotts.

So much would be happening this next year, he didn't even want to think about it.

Sarah would be leaving W.F.S. in June this year, her eleventh birthday just a few days before his exams. Mum and Dad still hadn't

saved up enough money for the full Hogwarts tuition, though – but that was okay, Sarah had assured them quickly when they sat her down to tell her, much in the same way they'd told Harry. She'd read that Ancient Runes didn't start at Hogwarts until Third Year, and she couldn't bear not studying her favourite and best subject for that long. Afterwards she'd laughed when she saw Harry watching from the doorway; this way she'd be around far more often to annoy the hell out of her biggest brother.

Typical Sarah, Harry thought as he washed the ink off his fingers. Always trying to make Mum and Dad feel less guilty about the way things are – not realizing that he himself was exactly the same way, downplaying the disappointment of learning he would not be attending Hogwarts, waving off the second hand clothes and tattered study books that was all they could afford. He didn't even mind sharing his room with Jonas, not when he'd already been doing so for all of his life that he could remember. I mean, sure, Jonas snored – but what was a little loud breathing, when if you listened long enough you could hear a baby screaming from halfway across Were some nights?

Within a few minutes, the open textbooks and half-finished essays had been filed carefully into his cheap wooden desk, and Harry picked up his polished wand reverently, ready for some practice in the heavily warded living room.

With himself studying at home, Jonas off with on his apprenticeship and Sarah about to join him in the ranks of the home-schooled ... that only left Andrew. Little Andrew, his youngest brother, the most fragile of them all.

A few years ago, when Andrew was just beginning school, he had fallen ill with Dragon Pox; something had gone wrong with the vaccinations two years prior that none of them had foreseen, and for the next three months, the tiny auburn child was bedridden, covered from head to toe in sickly green spots and coughing up fluid like there was no tomorrow. James had taken the time off work, though their bank account had suffered dearly for it, and the three older children would often watch worriedly from the doorway as their little brother's temperature fluctuated wildly.

As if to make matters worse, Harry's abnormal magical core had soon made itself known in his worry, sending the very foundations of

the street shaking and trembling, and for the first time James had had to force one of the strongest calming droughts he had on hand into him, sending him into a near comatose state which had done nothing to alleviate Jonas and Sarah's fears.

Lily had rushed home from work that day to a chaotic household, indeed.

Ever since then, Harry, Jonas and Sarah had been extraordinarily protective of Andrew, who had been slight and thinner than was strictly healthy ever since. Subdued, the memories of that dark time of his life weighing heavily on the small child's mind and over time he became even quieter than Harry, who as if in contrast was beginning to emerge from the shell he had forced around himself out of necessity.

Jonas and Sarah had asked on the strange ordeal that had befallen Harry, and James and Lily had been forced to explain to all three of the younger children exactly why Harry spent so much time sitting in his room, meditating. The three younger siblings had spent the next few days on tiptoes around Harry, until Harry finally sat them down and told them in a flat tone with a hard glint in his eyes that he was not going to hurt them.

And there hadn't been any problems since then.

Well, Harry sighed as he practiced the summoning charm absently. There hadn't been any big problems. After all – no one had died the time when he accidentally collapsed the school gym, and he was pretty sure Frankie's arm had been reattached properly after he snuck up on Harry that one night.

But they'd never had to resort to ... that. Not yet. And, if he kept up his daily sessions in his bedroom, if he made sure to keep a few vials of calming drought on him and kept himself under control, they never would have to use that.

His heart stuttered just thinking about it.

No, Felix promised he wouldn't do that unless it was an emergency, and there was no other option, Harry told himself firmly, flicking his wand with a little too much force and sending the cushion flying towards him with enough strength to easily knock him out. Dodging

quickly, Harry winced as he heard a vase on the bookshelf smash, and repaired it quickly, hoping no one would notice the newest hairline crack when they got home that night.

It's not going to happen, it's not, he told himself firmly. So stop. Worrying. The rising panic was swiftly and expertly dampened, and moments later, forgotten altogether.

Taking a deep, steady breath, Harry raised his wand hand again and shot a quick succession of silent spells towards Sarah's old bear he'd 'borrowed' for the lesson, transfiguring it into an animated pair of gothic candlesticks that danced around the rug covering the wooden floor.

Why worry about something that would never happen, when it was far more fun to torment his little sister when she returned home from school?

A fifteen year old Harry descended from his room one night after studying for the upcoming OWLs – he would be sitting them in two weeks' time at the Ministry, early June just like the rest of the country was – to find Lily and James sitting at the dining table with his three younger siblings arranged before them.

"Speak of the devil – Harry! Come here, pull up a seat – there's something your mother and I want to talk to you four about," James smiled at his oldest son, who shrugged and fell into a wooden chair between Jonas and Andrew, leaning back and folding his arms loosely over his stomach.

"Now, everyone," Lily smiled at them, her hand folded casually in James' as they looked over their four children happily, "we have some very good news to share with you!"

"No. Way," Jonas stared at Lily. "You're pregnant?"

Lily laughed.

"No, Jonas, I'm not pregnant," she shook her head while James smiled at him, "besides, I don't think we'd have anywhere to put the baby if we did have one ... no, this news is even better than that. Andrew, could you come here a moment?"

Slightly apprehensively, Andrew slid from his chair and moved to stand before his mother, his green eyes apprehensively watching as she drew something from her jeans pocket.

"Andrew, your father and I have been working very, very hard for this moment, but it's finally here," she told him in a low tone that carried throughout the entire kitchen. "Andrew; you're going to Hogwarts!"

The item she'd pulled from her pocket was revealed to be a letter, written on heavy, expensive parchment with the Hogwarts crest pressed firmly into a seal of red wax proudly.

Andrew's eyes widened, and he stared up at them, silent with wonder.

"Andy?" Jonas gasped. "Andy's going to – to Hogwarts? No way!"

Sarah, too was gaping in surprise, but Harry merely sat there, staring at the small boy who's face broke into the broad grin of someone whose lifelong dream had come true. Andrew had spoken with Harry often, telling him how he wished things were different for their family – how he wished he could have gone to the prestigious schools all those rich families took for granted. Andrew loved learning, he loved devouring the books Harry bought home from the public library since he'd been given a card just two years ago, he loved discovering how the world around them worked and all kinds of interesting facts that he would spout at any given moment in the day.

Going to Hogwarts would have meant the world to Andrew.

And now; it did.

He was going.

Andrew Mark Potter was officially enrolled for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, the school built and designed for the elitist families, the place where only the best of the best were accepted, and he was going.

He had never been happier in his entire life.

"Harry?"

Harry looked over from his dimly lit desk to Jonas' bed, where his thirteen year old brother lay awake in his bed, staring at him sleepily.

"Yeah, Jo?" Harry replied softly, setting down the quill and pushing his chair back slightly to show his attention.

"Are you ... never mind."

"Oh no you don't," Harry settled the younger teen with a mock glare, moving over to Jonas' bed and sitting on him, staring down at the surprised and disgruntled face. "Tell me. What's bothering you?"

"It's ... just ... have you ever felt ... angry, at me or Andrew because of ..."

Harry sighed. He'd been expecting this.

"Because you've got your apprenticeship, and Andy's going to Hogwarts of all places, when I'm stuck here reading books and trying to learn it on my own?"

Jonas nodded hesitantly. It had never really occurred to him before, but realizing Andrew was about to leave for the highest praised school in all of Europe had suddenly struck home to him, and he was forced to look at his life from the view of someone outside, watching as someone else received the destiny he wanted.

He couldn't imagine how Harry must feel, having actually been on the Hogwarts register at one point, while he himself had never even been considered for it.

"Look, Jo ... sometimes, when I've been home alone all day, or I hit a wall in my studies, or – or when the meditation just isn't working, and I'd give anything for someone else to be there, to help ... then, I might feel envious of you, with Louise, or Sarah back when she was still in First School ... but I learned the hard way long ago that you can't change the way things are, or were. You can only change what will be, that's why I try so hard even though I don't have to, that's why I work to try and make Mum and Dad proud, so they don't feel guilty that they didn't give me the life they wanted to. Andy going to Hogwarts, it doesn't change anything," Harry smiled hesitantly at Jo,

who still hung off his every word just as he had when he was younger. "We should be proud of Andy. And we are."

Jonas sighed and pushed Harry off, who gave a quiet, controlled laugh and caught himself on the bed frame before he hit the floor. He moved back to his own side of the small room, closing the light and pulling off his shirt before sliding into bed.

"Thanks, Harry," Jonas whispered, before falling silent.

"Anytime, Jo."

And, crouched in the doorway, Sarah and Andrew looked at each other quickly before darting silently back into their own room and crawling into their beds without a single word.

Sometimes, things couldn't be said or acknowledged aloud, only felt or known instinctively.

And this was one of those things.

Commentary: Fun Facts and Masters

Jonas' Master, Louise Pomfrey, does indeed have the same name as the heroine of the muse that kept this going, The Familiar of Zero. However, I decided on the name "Louise" for my original character several days before I stumbled upon and began watching The Familiar of Zero. Being my usual, clueless I only discovered this similarity later while editing a handful of scenes from Those Less Worthy. Creepy, huh?

Also, the idea of 'Masters and Apprentices' is based solely on my first impression upon reading Harry Potter all those years ago, where Snape was announced as a Potions Master, and I assumed this to mean he had some sort of apprentice/student as well. This, of course, turned out to be wrong, but seeing as this can become instrumental to my plot, I decided to incorporate it into this fanfiction.

Chapter Five: King's Cross

June approached quickly, and before Harry knew it, it was time for James to apparate them into the Ministry for his first set of OWL exams. He would be taking the notoriously nail-biting exams two at a time, theoretical then practical, every day for nine consecutive work days until all his subjects were taken care of; Defense Against the Dark Arks, Transfiguration, Potions, Herbology, History of Magic, Muggle Studies, Astronomy and Ancient Runes (upon his sister's urging, who wanted to know what OWL level Runes were like before sitting them.) He would also be sitting small, optional tests on Wand Care and Non-Verbal Casting, to prepare him for the NEWT years and to make sure he was doing it correctly.

Harry wouldn't call himself an academic, per say, but there was a certain ... thrill to receiving that report card at the end of the school year, knowing that every grade on that card was earned by you, and you alone; showing that grade to his parents had always been the highlight of his independent studies, showing them they didn't need to spend thousands of galleons, or send him to a fancy school, just for good grades.

That was probably one of the only reasons he'd tried so hard to get it right; not for himself, not for his future – though he certainly had that in mind, at least – but for them, for Mum and Dad, Lily and James, who he knew worried about him on his more silent days.

But he'd show them, with these OWLs that finally counted for something, he'd show them a reason to be proud of him, he'd show them he was doing just fine without the private education system Andrew was destined for; he'd show them there was nothing wrong with the cheaper, simpler option Sarah had begun just this last year.

He'd make them proud. He knew he would.

"Haaaaarry!" Sarah hollered up the stairs, breaking a sixteen-year-old Harry from his serene meditation with the subtlety and pitch of a foghorn. "Maaaail's heeeeere!"

" ... Shut up! I'm trying to meditate!" Harry yelled hoarsely back, his closed eyes twitching weakly as a tall glass of water on his bedside table frothed with one large, single bubble. There were dark rings hanging beneath his closed eyelids, the only indication of the worry

and anticipation he'd been suffering the last month as he meditated endlessly, waiting for the results of the exams to finally come-

"Harry!" Jonas' loud voice joined Sarah's eagerly – too eagerly, in Harry's opinion. "But you've got a letter! It says it's from the Ministry-!"

"What?" Harry needed no more encouragement, and within a record of mere seconds was racing into the dining room, almost bowling James over as he was about to leave to fetch his work robes.

"Woah! Easy there, tiger, calm down," James chuckled, holding up his hands and stepping aside for Harry, who had been hopping impatiently to enter the kitchen/dining area. "Try not to kill me next time, hey Harry?"

Harry didn't answer, paying his father not the slightest attention as his half-lidded eyes zeroed in on the small pile of letters Sarah was clutching, the common Ministry barn owl perched on a chair back calmly.

"Oh, I thought you might be down," Sarah's eyes gleamed cunningly at Harry, who met her eyes tensely. "I suppose you'll be wanting – this?" She pulled one thick parchment letter from the pile, and Harry's eyes followed it, narrowing.

"Sarah-

"Uh uh uh, first we have to discuss conditions!" Sarah leapt away when Harry started forward, sighing heavily at the all-too-familiar scene that, despite his best attempts to stop it, had occurred almost every year since he started taking tests at the Ministry five years ago. Jonas and Andrew watched their two dark haired, green eyed siblings with a look of amusement on Jonas' face, and wariness on Andrew's. They had already sat down for breakfast, and Andrew closed the book he was reading before quickly drawing his bowl of muesli closer, protecting it from the inevitable backlashes of raw magic that was bound to escape when Harry finally lost it; there was nothing Sarah loved more than breaking the supposedly impenetrable cocoon Harry kept around himself.

A familiar, high sound began to chime softly in the room; a pair of tiny round bells hanging over the doorway, swaying gently as wind began to move impossibly through the dawn-lit room.

"Give me that Merlin-damned le-"

"Nope! Beg for it!"

"Sarah," Lily gave her daughter a flat, unimpressed look from where she was slipping the leftover milk back into the cooling container. "Give Harry his letter."

"I was just having a bit of fun—" Sarah protested, holding out her hand gingerly. The jingling of the bells ceased as Harry's tense face smoothed over eerily. Jonas glanced at them as the last, high note left the kitchen silent but for the deep, slow breathing of their eldest brother.

"Yeah right," Harry muttered as he snatched the letter from her reluctant hand, tearing it open and retreating into the lounge as he tugged the sheaths of folded parchment free.

"Well, Harry?" Lily called to him, walking around the dividing wall and watching him from the archway. He was facing away from them, his eyes cast down on the sheet of open parchment. "What does it say?"

"I ... well ... at least I passed everything?" Harry's voice was somewhat hopeful as he finally turned to the curious eyes of his mother, brothers and sister – James having removed himself to the bathroom to get ready for the day.

"Let me see," Lily held out her hand expectantly, and Harry gingerly passed the sheet to her, actually cringing in anticipation. "First off – Astronomy. Hm, we didn't do much work on that, did we Harry? Acceptable for written and practical, overall grade Acceptable. Ancient Runes—" Sarah perked up at this, "-Acceptable theory, but your practical Exceeds Expectations – overall grade of Acceptable. Charms – oh, well done Harry, Exceeds Expectations, Outstanding with an overall grade of Outstanding! Very well done," Lily smiled at Harry, who smiled weakly back, knowing that Lily – whose own talents lay in Charms and Potions – would at least be pleased with the results.

"Alright ... Defense Against the Dark Arts – straight O's, like we expected anything less from our little Defense genius ... Herbology – are you listening Jonas? – Exceeds Expectations straight through!"

"Alright!" Jonas punched the air, grinning at Harry with an almost ... evil glint in his eye. "I knew I shouldn't have listened to you all those times you told me to shut up!"

"Alright, settle down," Lily smiled at Jonas, who looked so much more excited than Harry did about his results. "History of Magic – wow, Harry, Exceeds Expectations, far better than your father or I ever got ... then again, you didn't have a drone of a ghost as a teacher either."

All four children – who had grown up listening to the tales and stories of their parents' times and trials at Hogwarts – chuckled lightly, easing the tension that seemed to permeate from Harry ever so slightly.

And then: the obvious object of his nervousness was revealed.

"Muggle Studies ... oh, Harry, really? Acceptable, Exceeds Expectations, overall Acceptable? I know you don't appreciate your muggle heritage as much as I do, but really? A son of mine, passing Muggle Studies with Acceptable ..." Lily continued to lecture him for a few tense minutes, while Sarah and Jonas smirked at Harry from behind their half-empty bowls and cups of water. Harry resisted the sudden and childish urge to poke his tongue right back at them – as if they would pass with anything better ...

"And I'll be talking about this with your father later," were Lily's last words, causing Harry to tense slightly, before she finally moved on. "Okay, Potions – finally, Harry, see, I knew all that studying would pay off! Outstanding, Exceeds Expectations – I suppose you forgot to add that fourth matured root shred three seconds after the rest, you were telling me it was a Mandrake Drought, right? – with an overall of Outstanding! That was very well done, Harry, I know you've always struggled a little in Potions ... and, finally, Transfiguration ... ooh, James will be pleased! Straight O's, all that practicing on Sunday nights really did do you some good!"

Harry looked at her as she paused, seeing that she hadn't read out the additional exams, the ones that weren't offered at Hogwarts because it was assumed those were taught by the children's own parents, and were therefore not offered as class curriculum.

"Last but not least; Wand Care ... Exceeds Expectations, and," Lily drew out the moment, knowing the three younger children were leaning forward in their seats in anticipation. "Non-Verbal Casting ... a practical exam not usually taken until NEWT year ... Outstanding!"

Despite themselves, Jonas, Sarah and Andrew gave out a little cheer, and even Harry smiled and blushed – just a little – at the look of pride on his mother's face. She smoothed the parchment out and taped it to the cork board of school notices and reports they hung on one wall above the couch, where all the best – and worst – achievements of the family went.

"Well done, Harry-bear," Lily told her eldest son empathically, walking over and kissing his forehead – noting that she didn't have to lean down quite as much as she had used to, and almost sighed at the physical evidence that her son, her little boy, was finally growing up. "I'm proud of you."

Harry smiled up at her, his initial nervousness fading fast in the face of his mother's happiness.

"But I will be talking to you later about your abysmal Muggle Studies grade!"

Harry winced, but nodded in resignation, then quietly excused himself to his room; all that worrying over the past week had finally hit home, and he felt ready to sleep the day away. Thankfully, Lily didn't press the matter – knowing from experience how drained, but at the same time relieved, Harry was – and let him leave the early-morning company without complaint.

Harry passed James on the staircase on his way up, but didn't comment when he was asked how his grades had went.

"That good, huh?" James smiled at his retreating back, and wandered into the kitchen to kiss his wife goodbye and steal a glance at the report sheet on the wall.

It was always a relief to see that, despite the way things were ... at least one of their kids was going to come out on top of things.

The day before Andrew was due to leave for Hogwarts – the whole family would be turning out to see him off at the station – Harry was found walking through the streets of Were, his eyes searching for something ... or rather, someone.

"Blaise," Having finally spotted the Italian wizard turning into one of the less-frequented alleys, who paused upon hearing the dark-haired teen's voice. "Wait up!"

Blaise turned, his dark eyes calculating as he watched his one-time friend approach. They hadn't spoken much since Blaise began his education at Hogwarts five years before, only fleetingly during holidays or breaks, maybe a letter or two for birthday congratulations if they remembered.

"Potter."

Harry sighed – only a little one, this time, Mum would have been proud at his restraint – as he came to a stop a few metres from the older boy.

"How many times must I tell you, call me Harry," he spoke with his usual calm tones, although this time laced with rebuke and distant familiarity. "Anyway – there's something I wanted to ask you."

"Then ask."

Blaise never had been the most ... social person he'd met. But perhaps that was what had drawn him to the other boy in the first place.

"You know my little brother–"

"Which one?"

Harry's eyes narrowed, just a little – unsure if he had imagined the slightly-mocking undertone in the slightly older boy's question.

"Andrew."

"Whi ... oh, the ginger. What about him?"

Deep breaths, Harry ... deep breaths.

Merlin, he hoped Andrew wouldn't be like this after five years of "proper" wizarding education.

"Well, he's going to Hogwarts this year, and I was wondering if you could keep an eye out for him, y'know, make sure he knows where everything is, keep him away from bullies, that sorta thing," Harry flashed Blaise his most practiced 'big brother' smile, one he'd used all too often on Mum and Dad to get himself out of some of the ... trickier situations Jonas or Sarah had lured him into over the years.

"That ... depends." Blaise's voice was smooth and slow, as it always had been, and his face betrayed none of the emotions Harry was sure were hidden behind the empty facade. Why is it I see so much of myself in him ... yet he feels so different?

"On ...?"

Suddenly, Blaise's face broke out into a sneer, and Harry took a step back, shocked at the visible change of the young boy he'd once known.

"Nothing a commoner like you would understand, peasant." Blaise pushed past Harry, who wasn't so shocked as to not reply,

"You'd do well to remember, Zabini, that you were one of those commoners yourself, not that long ago."

Blaise didn't falter as he walked smoothly away from the angry teen, his tailored robes hanging perfect, his shined boots clicking gently against the stone cobbled path.

Harry, meanwhile, watched him go with a faintly puzzled look on his face, the fleeting anger pushed cleanly away with practiced ease.

What was up with him?

Finally; the day they'd all been praying for, yet dreading at the same time, arrived.

None of the Potter children had ever spent more than a week away from home, for sleepovers or the rare school camp. For the first month after Andrew's acceptance, there had been joy, celebration, happiness in the large family. But, as September First grew closer and closer, the realization that Andrew would be leaving them ... for good, until Christmas Holidays, at least ... slowly sank in.

Now, it was all Lily could do not to burst into tears as she watched that auburn head disappear into the carriage – Harry helping him load the slightly battered trunk James had pulled out of storage and spelled into a usable condition.

Sarah and Jonas, meanwhile, were standing against one of the tall stone pillars supporting the arching roof, staring at the families and students that surged around them. There was no doubt about it.

Andrew was going to be way out of his league at Hogwarts.

The robes that swirled around them were bright, silk, expensive, delicately embroidered and sewn with family shields set proudly on their lapels or upper back. The two watched as literally hundreds of galleons worth of jewelry, clothes, bags, purses, make-up, hair ornaments and more passed in the blink of an eye.

Sarah – with her best knee-length, layered skirt and silver dragonfly clips Lily had given her for her recent twelfth birthday – stared at both older and younger girls that wore the gold-plated ornaments and jewel-studded handbags so casually. Jonas, wearing Harry's old dress pants and scuffed sneakers, shuffled uncomfortably when he saw the pampered eleven year olds, to his own thirteen, that were clutching small fortunes to be used for purchasing candy on the ride over.

"Jo?" Sarah turned to her older brother hesitantly. Jonas looked down the short distance at his slightly-younger sister, waiting for her to continue. "Andy's gonna be okay ... right?"

Jonas knew what she meant without her having to say it; there was no way Andrew, their little Andrew who was so shy around strangers, was going to fit in around these people. He struggled for an answer, but as the silence drew longer, he realized – he didn't know.

So instead he turned back to his previous task of people-watching, ignoring when Sarah's green eyes – identical to Lily's, and Harry's – pierced him pleadingly.

All the while, James and Lily stood just a few metres away, watching as the crowds of families they had once been a part of, parted around them. Having been those children, not so long ago, they remembered the thrill of slipping into those new uniforms for the first time, they remembered sitting in the wonderfully upholstered seats, they remembered shrugging off the thick, new books – that would have easily cost their family a hundred galleons all together – as nothing more than a nuisance.

Oh, how different it was to watch all this drama from the sidelines, how different it was to see such wealth through the eyes of those they themselves had looked down on in their own Hogwarts years.

James, his arm wrapped comfortingly around Lily's shoulders, was suddenly reminded of a boy his own age, with greasy black hair and sunken cheeks, who had clearly come from a family not as blessed as the Potters had once been. He remembered the taunts he and his pure- or half-blooded friends had forced on him, he remembered the cruel spells and pranks they cursed the potions genius with just because he was different to them, just because he dressed strangely, just because he had less money than them.

Looking back, he regretted all of it. He remembered the way Lily had looked at him, back then, and he saw finally what she had – there was no need to look down on others, just because they were poorer, or came from a different side of town. But now Andrew – who James could so easily see walking the footsteps of the spiteful Severus Snape – was headed for just that same situation ... and James found himself hating the person he had once been.

Seeing things through the eyes of the other party, really did show him just how unjust and ugly this world could be.

"Here's some pocket money me and Jonas saved up, think of it as a late birthday present," Harry looked serenely at Andrew, handing him three sickles in a small cotton, drawstring pouch. "You can use it to buy some chocolate frogs or something, I know Mum's packed lunch won't get you nearly as hyper as you need to be."

Andrew smiled shyly up at him as he took the sickles silently, already dressed in the new Hogwarts robes James had had fitted for him.

"Thank you, Harry," he said in a soft voice, and Harry's eyes softened as he took in the small, slightly pitiful sight his youngest brother made. He crouched down so he was on eye-level with the boy – who was sitting on the patterned seat nervously – and smiled reassuringly.

"Hey, Andy – it's gonna be fine. You're going to make loads of new friends, you'll learn so much new stuff you can show off to me these holidays – and who knows, you might even snag yourself a girlfrien–"

"Harry! I'm only eleven!" Andrew looked indignantly up at his teenaged sibling, a mock-glare of anger piercing Harry.

"So? The early bird catches the flobberworm," Harry's face wrinkled into an expression the eleven-year-old couldn't distinguish between genuine encouragement, or teasing.

"As if, girls are gross, anyway."

Harry huffed.

"Trust me, little brother, you'll be thinking a whole lot differently when you're my age."

"Because you're the pinnacle of wisdom and good advice," Andrew retorted sarcastically, folding his arms with a small smile tucked away on his lightly freckled face.

"You wound me, Andy," Harry's eyes creased into a parody of betrayal as he staggered back against the opposite seat, drawing the first laugh that day from Andrew. "There will be revenge for this when you get home, mark my words!"

"Not if Dad stops you," Andrew's eyes dimmed a little at the reminder that he would be leaving, and Harry sighed in a highly put-upon sort of way. Yes, he could distinguish between his trademark sighs. Jonas had even put together a small notebook a few years ago, claiming it to be a translator between "Harry-speak" and the rest of the world. He'd called upon and written in that notebook

almost daily for a year before claiming to have every variation of 'siiiiigh' down straight.

"Andy ... you're gonna be fine," he was about to say more, when a suddenly piercing whistle echoed down the corridors.

"Last call for passengers!"

"I've ... gotta go," Harry said needlessly, and Andrew nodded lamely, his eyes fixated on his thin knees. "Good luck, Andy." Harry hesitated, then leaned down and quickly hugged the thin boy, even kissing his forehead swiftly. "No one ever hears of this, okay?"

"Okay," Andrew smiled at him, his eyes following Harry as the teenager left the compartment quickly – before he lost the courage to do so.

Andrew quickly moved to the window seat – he was alone in the private compartment, although he could see students of all ages moving up and down the corridor through the misted glass of the closed door – and his hazel eyes quickly sought out the distinct sight his family made. He met his mother's eyes – waving when she did – and caught a last glimpse of Sarah and Jonas before he felt a dull shudder run through the train floor.

He finally saw Harry's retreating back, heading back towards the others, and quickly opened the window to lean his head out as the train began to move.

"Write to me!" he shouted out the window as loud as he could manage; he was a little out of practice, with Jonas and Sarah already making enough noise to awaken the dead, he was definitely the quietest of the four.

James waved his arm to show that he'd heard – any further words would have been lost in the explosion of noise echoing in the tunnel from the engine – and Harry turned, waving a little when he finally spotted his brother's face just before it vanished from sight.

"See ya, Harry," Andrew said quietly to himself, the dark tunnel suddenly splitting into piercing light and open fields a few minutes later. He still hadn't moved from the window, and continued to stare out even as air rushed in and ruffled his chin-length hair.

"Hey – is this spot taken?"

He turned to see a boy his age enter, his almond-colored hair and blue eyes settled in aristocratic features. His casual robes – not yet exchanged for Hogwarts ones – were in expensive fabric, although they lacked a shield, indicating he was not, in fact, of pure blood as Andrew had initially thought.

Waving his hand silently to show that it was not, Andrew settled back in his seat and watched as the clearly-rich boy made himself at home. Then again, everyone's rich here.

"Finnigan, Neil Finnigan, pleasure to meet you," the boy – Neil – extended his hand to Andrew, who took it hesitantly.

"Andrew Potter, it's nice to, um, meet you too." Andrew's voice fell back just a little, and his eyes averted as Neil watched him closely.

"Potter ... not the son of James Potter, the Head of the Noble and Ancient House, wife of a muggleborn ... let's see ... Lily Potter nee Ivan? Or was it Evans ..." Neil spouted out in a quick mouthful, as if reciting from memory, his voice trailing off toward the end as memory failed him.

How do these people remember that kind of stuff?

"Y ... es, that is correct," Andrew drew the sentence out hesitantly, unsure of how to deal with this new specimen of wizard before him.

"Whatever happened to them, they haven't been seen or heard from in over a decade. M' Mum thought they'd been offed by some of You-Know-Who's avengers, to tell the truth," Neil mused quietly, a slight hint of an Irish accent falling through.

"Well, they aren't dead, that's for sure," Andrew laughed nervously, unsure of how much he should reveal to the new and strange boy. "My ... um, parents had to move away before I was born, when my older brother was about two or three, and they couldn't tell anyone where they were going, so ... I guess ... they kinda forgot?"

Neil laughed suddenly, and Andrew smiled in confusion.

"You're strange, Andrew Potter. So – any idea where you're headed?"

"Where I'm ...?"

"Y'know, what House you're gonna be in?"

"I don't know what ... oh, you mean the Hogwarts Houses?"

Neil rolled his eyes.

"Yes the 'Hogwarts Houses,' what did you think I was talking about, numbskull?"

Andrew flushed, but quickly replied,

"Well, I'm not ... quite sure where I'll be going, but both my parents were there, so I really hope I get either Gryffindor- " Neil didn't need to speak up for Andrew to see the words 'not likely' flash across his face, "-or Ravenclaw."

"Oh, so you like reading?"

"Uh huh! Love it," Andrew was beginning to warm up to the boy, actually leaning forward a little in his seat now that the topic was one he could compare with.

"So, have you read the school curriculum yet, or are you waiting for- "

"Are you kidding? I read those, years ago!" Andrew smiled. "I just finished reading my brother's old third year books, but I don't think I could manage any of that magic just yet ..."

"Oh, so your brother's at Hogwarts too?"

"N ... no, he's not." And, just like that, all of Andrew's good mood and excitement was gone, blown out like a candle in the wind. Gone.

"Oh – is he ... de-"

"No, he's fine ... it's just ... my family – we don't have ... a lot of money," Andrew mumbled to his feet, his hands twisting nervously

into the padded cushions on either side. "I'm the first one out of my brothers and sister to go to Hogwarts."

"How many are there?" It was impossible to tell Neil's emotions from his voice, and Andrew certainly wasn't about to try and read his expression – not all the practice in the world with Harry could have prepared him for the groomed mask across from him.

"There's Harry – he's just turned sixteen, then Jonas, who's thirteen, and, um, Sarah. She's twelve," Andrew's voice grew softer and softer, until it could barely be heard over the rumble of tracks beneath their feet.

"Really?" Neil's voice was still neutral, and Andrew finally raised his eyes – just a little. And just in time to see a quick smile flitter across that face. "My brother's sixteen too, his name's Seamus – I guess he would've been in the same year as – Harry, was it? – if he'd come to Hogwarts too."

Andrew straightened, until he was finally looking Neil straight in the eye, and stared at him in disbelief.

"Y ... you're not-?"

"Leaving?" Neil snorted. "As if. Friends are hard to come by these days – what with all that talk of the Death Eater's trying to resurrect You-Know-Who, and all those terrorist attacks on France just last month – so I'm not gonna be so picky that I'd turn someone down just 'cause they're not from as rich a family as I am."

Andrew winced – he could have worded that just a bit less arrogantly – but smiled none the less.

It looked like Harry had been right.

He'd already found a friend.

Commentary: OWLs Results

You may or may not have noticed, but Harry scored 'Outstanding's in all the practical areas of those subjects involving wandwork – Transfiguration, Charms, Defense Against the Dark Arts, Non-Verbal. This is due to his immense magical core and energy. Harry is

extremely adept at picking up new spells and mastering them, thus his very early mastery of Non-Verbal Magic; it's the theory where he (sometimes) falls behind. And if he seems smarter than he did in canon, remember, this Harry has parents to impress, and no Ron to hold him back. Of course he's going to do better.

For those of you who skipped the epic-long paragraphs detailing his scores, here they are in standard form:

Ancient Runes

Written: A

Practical: E

Overall Grade: A

Astronomy

Written: A

Practical: A

Overall Grade: A

Charms

Written: E

Practical: O

Overall Grade: E

Defense Against the Dark Arts

Written: O

Practical: O

Overall Grade: O

Herbology

Written: E

Practical: E

Overall Grade: E

History of Magic

Written: E

Practical: N/A

Overall Grade: E

Muggle Studies

Written: A

Practical: E

Overall Grade: A

Potions

Written: O

Practical: E

Overall Grade: O

Transfiguration

Written: O

Practical: O

Overall Grade: O

Optional Subjects

Wand Care: E

Non-Verbal Casting: O

Total Grades

Outstanding: Four

Exceeds Expectations: Four

Acceptable: Three

... and a total of eleven OWLs. Although, this could also be divided into ten OWLs and one NEWT, as Non-Verbal Casting is supposed to be a NEWT subject.

Oh, and in case you were wondering, the idea I made of Wand Care covers things like polishing, holding it correctly, making sure you wave it without disemboweling someone – that sort of thing. It also includes how you handle the wand magically, that is, whether you're using the correct amount of magic and not flooding your wand core, risking damage to the wand itself. Harry received an Exceeds Expectations because he used too much magic in his spells, rather than not enough. Basically, in order to improve his grade in this exam (which he intends to take again in NEWT year), he needs to better his control over his magical core – which was the reason Felix and his parents encouraged him to take the test.

Chapter Six: Enter, Hell

The night after Andrew had left for Hogwarts, the Potter family was sitting down for another silent meal when a tawny owl swooped in through the open window overlooking the dark street. It bore a single letter, written on a standard folded parchment with three words written on the back; Mum and Dad.

"It's from Andrew!" Sarah said happily, leaping up and taking the letter from the owl, who ruffled its feathers and cast one eye over a strip of meat Jonas was tearing into.

James half-raised from his chair before Sarah returned to the table, both of them sitting themselves slowly, staring at the letter in anticipation.

"Wha'does it say?" Jonas mumbled around his mouthful, earning him a disapproving look from Lily and a sharp elbow from Harry, who had until then been sitting before his untouched plate apathetically.

"Mum ... d'you wanna read it?" Sarah offered Lily the letter, but she shook her head and motioned for Sarah to go ahead; she wasn't sure if she would make it through the letter without bursting into tears. Was this how her parents had felt when she left for Hogwarts? No wonder 'Tuny had hated her ...

Sarah peeled the plain seal off, cleared her throat importantly – preening under the attention from her older brothers and parents – and began to read,

To Mum and Dad and Everyone Else,

"That's nice, he doesn't even say our names," Jonas muttered, and Harry gave him a swift hit over the head with a serving spoon. "Mum! Did you see-?"

"Quiet, Jonas," Lily looked at him apologetically.

I hope you're all alright ... I've really missed you guys last night, but you won't believe this place! It's incredible! It's even better than Mum's stories, it's beautiful! I can't believe I'm going to be living here until Christmas, and then after for seven more years!

The Sorting Hat worked just like you said, Dad. It was kinda weird ... but guess what House I was put in?

"Ravenclaw," all three siblings said in union, Sarah reading aloud while Jonas and Harry predicted accurately, knowing their younger brother all too well. Jonas snorted into his plate, and Harry couldn't help but shoot a satisfied look at the indignant expression on Sarah's face.

I know Dad'll be pretty disappointed I didn't get up in Gryffindor ... but face it, that's Harry's house, not mine.

"I'm not sure whether that was a compliment, or an insult," Harry muttered to himself, then winced when a sharp thought ran him through; after all, did it really matter which House he might have been in ... when, in reality, he could never truly belong to one?

The thought was soon one of the quickest of those to be evicted from his all-too-active mind.

The most amazing thing happened on the train ride over. I met a boy my age called Neil Finnigan, he's the same year as me, and he got sorted into Ravenclaw too! We became friends on the train ride over, and I found out he has an older brother called Seamus who's the same age as Harry! Pretty cool huh? Neil said that they would've been friends, too, if Harry had come to Hogwarts-

The letter was suddenly interrupted when Harry abruptly pushed his chair back, his eyes shadowed, and left.

"Harry?" Lily called worriedly, going to stand but stopping when James placed a hand on her arm gently.

"Let him go, Lil'. He needs space to think."

"But-"

"Lily." James leveled a flat stare at her, and Lily reluctantly settled into the chair, huffing slightly.

"Go on, Sarah," Lily turned to her daughter, only to see Sarah gently lowering the letter to the table, her eyes unfocused. "Sarah?"

"I ... I think I'm gonna go lie down for a while," Sarah rushed out as she followed Harry, heading for the room that had once been hers and Andrew's ... but that was, for now, her's only.

For as long as she could remember, she had shared that small space with the slow, comforting breath of her only younger brother. It was the rhythm she listened to that lulled her to sleep, the song that calmed her whenever she and Jonas fought. But suddenly, the room – that she'd forever pleaded and dreamt of owning alone – seemed so empty without him there.

Jonas, meanwhile, sat before his pale parents and stared at the letter for a long moment, before slowly standing as if to leave.

"Jonas?" Lily said suddenly, causing the teen's head to turn in her direction. "Is there anything you want to say to us? Any – anything at all?" Her hand was clutching James' under the table, and by the tremble in her voice, it was all she could manage not to break down.

Jonas shook his head after a long, awkward silence, then retreated from the dining room with heavy footsteps, for once leaving his breakfast unfinished.

Lily and James turned to each other, lost for words but with eyes full of heartbreakin emotion. Reaching out, James pulled his wife into his arms as she buried her head in his shoulder, and the tears finally came.

Jonas entered his room – fully prepared to walk straight to his bed, ignoring wherever Harry might have been, and sulk just as he was sure his other two siblings were – only to immediately notice that Harry was not there.

"Figures," he muttered sullenly, backtracking into the narrow corridor that ended in a tiny stone balcony. The doors were open; Harry was obviously outside, despite the fact that he was nowhere to be seen. There was one place Harry always went to think, when he wanted to be truly alone – the sloped rooftop, complete with a perfect view of the town and whatever sky the weather had graced them with. He hadn't been there for many years – not since Jonas' own apprenticeship was announced, the teen suddenly remembered – but every time marked some sort of change in his life, when

something strange or devastating had happened to him, his family, or someone their family knew. Something that Harry couldn't cope with, so he resigned to the only instinct he allowed himself; get the fuck away, before something happens that you will regret.

I guess this would count as one of those times, huh Harry? Jonas thought sadly, debating whether or not he should confront Harry about his thoughts on Andrew leaving, but deciding against it. If and when Harry wanted to talk, he would find him. Harry was close to each of his siblings in different ways; to Andrew, Harry was the confident, the protector. To Sarah, Harry was a playmate, someone to tease and pull pranks on. But to Jonas ... their relationship was the sort where both could confide in the other, where the other was someone they went to whenever they had a problem, something close to ... that perhaps was ... a best friend.

But Jonas had somehow almost always been the one to go to Harry, with his problems. Only once had Harry ever sought out Jonas to talk, the day after one of his more ... dangerous accidents, where he had lost control and almost killed an innocent shopper for startling him. Harry had been thirteen at the time, and he had been deathly silent for weeks after. To Jonas' knowledge, the only person Harry had spoken to in that time ... was him.

But not this time, Jonas thought sadly. This time ... I'm a part of that pain, I know I am. First me, and my apprenticeship ... then Andrew going to Hogwarts. I know he put on the brave face, smiling right 'till the end, but ... how many more times will Harry be disappointed, because someone else was given the things he wanted most in life?

Leaning against the wooden banister that surrounded the descending stairs, Jonas' eyes caught a glimpse of Sarah's door on the level below. Not Andrew and Sarah's door; this time, now, it was just Sarah's.

She can't be much better off ... he sighed to himself. She and Andrew were always close, like Harry and I are. She would've told him how much she wanted to go to Hogwarts, back last year when she left First School. We all wanted to go, so badly. Didn't we always say, we would have given anything, for just one of us to go there? But ... when he finally is given the chance to go ... us others can't help but feel ...

Jonas let his arms fall from their pose as he moved to re-enter his and Harry's room. He wasn't one to complain; he had his teacher, Louise, a life time of studying Herbology at her side, he already had everything he wanted.

Hearing the muffled sobs from Sarah's room below, the creaking of the wooden slates above him as labored breath drifted through the open window – he knew Harry was holding back tears of his own ...

No. He wasn't one to complain at all.

The following weeks were excruciatingly painful for the Potter family. For all that the tiny boy had been the quietest of them all, with Andrew gone a perpetual hush had befallen the apartment. Jonas and Sarah – who had before been the life of the family, bringing tears and joy and countless headaches with their loud games and arguments – were as silent as a graveyard, preferring instead to remain in their rooms, in solitude. Harry was no better, spending his days cooped up at his desk – studying like there was no tomorrow – or laying on the roof, staring up at whatever cloud or star he could see at the time.

A new letter arrived from Andrew every other day, and Lily always made sure to pen a reply from all of them, regardless of whether her older children had heard Andrew's words or not. But, despite her best intentions, trying to keep up appearances so Andrew wouldn't feel guilty over something he couldn't control ... something must have come across in the tone of her words, in the shaky handwriting that signed her name, because as time passed, the letters grew less and less frequent, shorter and shorter. By the time September had reluctantly given way for October, his letters came perhaps once a week during yet another awkward family dinner.

The remaining siblings' friends were often seen frequenting the Potter home, trying and often temporarily succeeding in drawing them out of their newfound depressions, but by the time night fell, they would, without fail, regress into the mallow, spiteful people they had become.

Seeing what this decision had done to her three eldest children, Lily couldn't help but blame herself; if she hadn't taken Harry into work that day, if she hadn't rung up a debt of more money than she'd ever see in her life, if she hadn't forced them to move here, if they hadn't

been forced to live such plain lives, if they'd had the money to send all their children to Hogwarts, instead of just the youngest one ...

The night of Halloween, October 31st, was usually seen as a day of celebration throughout the wizarding community. The day You-Know-Who, the villain of a decade-long war, had been vanquished by a mere toddler, the world-famous Boy-Who-Lived, Neville Longbottom. This day, the anniversary of his death, was usually spent in the town of Were as festivals of bright light, dancing in the courtyard, the one night a year you could see banners in the street, colored lights hanging from your neighbors' windows, men and women running through the streets like children as they remembered the dark times that had passed.

But James, and Lily, and Harry and Jonas and Sarah, who were usually the first out on the streets on that day wearing their best clothes, laughing and drinking with the best of them, were instead sitting still and silent at their kitchen table, eating their nightly meal in an aura of deathly and fragile calm.

Their eyes did not meet. Their backs were straight against the wooden chairs, their hands poised perfectly to move the minimal amount required. They did not speak. The only sound that echoed in the small room was the sound of knives scraping across the cheap china plates, of a glass being set down, of salt being shaken over the heavy stew Lily had made for them.

Every now and then, a louder-than-usual cry or shriek of entertainment would wash over the family, as sounds of the celebration flooded the hidden city, but other than a wince, or a casual glance to the open windows, there was no acknowledgement among any of them.

Until, finally, James simply couldn't take it any more.

"For Merlin's fucking sake!" he roared, throwing his fork to the table and surging to his feet, ignoring as his chair fell back and clattered against the floor loudly. His wife and children started, a bell swung gently on the wall in alarm, and they all stared up at him as he towered over the creaking table in exasperation and barely-contained anger. They'd never seen him like this; James Potter was known to everyone as a gentle, loving man who would never so much as raise a finger against anything. And yet ...

"Will you lot pull your heads out and look at yourselves?" he cried, throwing his hands in the air before slamming them back down. Sarah jumped, her fingers loosening around the carefully poised fork until it fell point-first into a small mound of mashed potatoes. "I know the life your mother and I have given you is less than ideal, but will you get over it! We tried to send you there, fuck knows we did, but we couldn't! That does not give you the right to mope around when we, after years of working our backs off, finally scrape together enough money to send Andy there! You should be proud of him! Fuck, you should be proud of us! But you should not be sitting there, playing the sodding victim, when you know there was nothing we could do! Either we sent one of you there, or none, and we all know it would break Andy's heart if we told him – oh, sorry, you can't go to Hogwarts after all because your own big brothers and sister were too childish to get over the fact that they couldn't! I know it hurts, I know it isn't fair, but that's just the way things are!"

Jonas was staring up at his father as if he'd never seen him before, Sarah looked close to tears, and Harry was just about pale enough to pass off as an Inferi – but it had worked. Dammit, he knew he had gotten through to them, it had taken two months and a whole load of swearing that he just knew Lily would tear him out for later, but he had finally gotten through to them that-

Suddenly, through the once-more silent kitchen – though the silence was now a very much different one, one of apology and deep thought rather than anger and blame – the sounds of the celebration changed.

One moment, they had been sitting there – looking up at James in varying degrees of shock – with music and laughter and singing voices echoing through them. Only, in the next moment, for those voices to turn into screams of pure, unadulterated horror.

A window smashed in the distance. An unfamiliar voice roared a familiar spell, setting the dark sky alight with unholy fire. A scream was cut off suddenly, as if a door had been slammed ... or a spell had been cast.

James' eyes widened in fear as he turned to the window framing a red night sky remembering another time so long ago when scenes such as this had been common place.

"It can't be ..." Lily whispered behind him. "No, it can't!"

MORMORDRE!

Writhes of green mist were thrown into the air from a hundred wands, twisting in demented patterns and folding into a cursed sign that had not been seen for a decade and a half.

And the bell above that doorway twisted savagely as panic whipped through Harry, shattering the kitchen windows and sending the teen to his knees, gasping for breath – though for what reason, he was very, very sure it was not the magic coursing through him. It was-

"Voldemort," James breathed, ignoring look his wife shot him as he half drew his precious wand from his belt-

"No, James, you can't!" Lily gasped, lurching forward and grasping his arm tightly.

"I can't just stand here and-" the rest of his sentence was cut off as the row of apartments across the thin path roared suddenly into flames, new and familiar screams piercing their ears. "I have to do something!"

"James, think of the kids!" Lily shouting pleadingly, waving one arm shakily to where Harry had pieced his wits together enough to drag the two younger under the table and cast as strong a shielding spell as he could, covering that with another that concealed the three of all sight. "I don't know what we'd do if you – if you died out ther-"

Another crash. Another scream. The ground shook for a moment or two, a distant roar of something echoing the bucking ground. Sarah whimpered as she dug her nails into Jonas' arm, kneeling between her two older brothers as they leant over her – Harry's spare hand that wasn't carding through her hair curled around his wand protectively – and swayed with the shaking foundations of the apartment. The sounds of crashing rock and wood, of pounding feet, of breaking glass and death teared through the air as it pierced the peaceful life they had lived, as it destroyed the place they called home, as it desecrated the memories, the homes, the lives, everything ...

There had never been in a raid like this. This ... this wasn't a raid. This wasn't just another of the Death Eater's old sprees, like they used to hold back then.

This was hell.

"Please, James, this is no time to play the hero – we need you here," Lily begged desperately, snagging James' arm in her two hands, and dragging down on it, trying in vain to persuade him to join their three children in hiding.

James glanced back at her, the flames of the sky and their friends' homes reflecting in his glasses, and for one, heart-stopping moment, she thought he wasn't going to listen, she thought he would go out there, she thought ... she thought ...

Then, as if all the fight had been blown out of him, he sagged forward, grabbed Lily's hands in a grip just as desperate as her own, and pulled her towards the low cabinet in a corner of the small room.

Harry's eyes followed them, and the swinging bell eased slightly in its pendulum arc. His white fingers creaked around the slim length of wood that kept him and his two siblings from harm, his nostrils flared as he struggled to keep his breathing under control, deep breaths, in, out, in, out, just like I was taught, just like I remember – Merlin, dammit, where – I need – potion?

"Harry!" Sarah gasped in a strangled voice, forcing him back to reality. Her voice was a cracking whisper, small and fragile and broken all at once as she pointed to the sliver of street they saw through the broken window. "Har-ry!"

Deep breaths, deep breaths, deep, deep, deep-

"Harry!" Jonas finally choked out, looking up at the glowing emerald eyes, tearing his own away from the sight of three black-cloaked demons prowling the street outside their house.

Calm – the – fuck – down!

Sliding his sweat-slicked fingers over the polished wood, Harry rose the tip of his wand shakily – his mind caught between a battle for control, and scrambling for a spell, for something-

"Si – si – silen–" he licked his dry lips nervously, ignoring Sarah's gasp when a jar on the counter burst open loudly, spreading shattered glass and sugar across the floor. The tip of his wand glowed feebly with every attempt, fading before he could force the magic out. Finally, closing his eyes and forcing every ounce of courage he could spare, his numb lips intoned, "Silenceo. O–" Deep breaths, "Obscuro - Maxima."

Dead silence.

And then the universe split in two.

It was dawn before the raid finally ... finally ... ended.

The night had been a night not one of the survivors would ever forget, even if they had wanted to. Explosions riddled the simple town with craters, pits of ash, gaping wounds in a city that had harbored so many as a safe haven after the destruction of the last war. Homes blackened by cursed fire were now nothing more than handfuls of ash, perhaps a bone or two where some poor soul had fallen. The sky was thick with smoke and dark, heavy clouds that smoldered gently over the grieving town.

The courtyard – that had once been a place of celebration, where all the best parties were held, where presentations and meetings and playtimes were orchestrated – was now nothing more than a thin scattering of rubble. The fountain, outside the hospital, was now a thin spidery creek running through the empty ruins of a building.

And, above it all, watching with bulged, demonic eyes ... the Dark Mark, the mark of Voldemort.

From the population of three and a half thousand, there were two hundred survivors. Those who had been tortured, rather than killed; those who had hidden, like the Potters had; those who had run, not fought; and ... those who had seen him.

It had been fifteen years, to the day, since he had walked the earth. But now it had been confirmed by almost twenty people, twenty poor, poor men and women driven to tears and madness by the memory of it.

But he was back.

Voldemort was back.

And the destruction of Were – a mindless destruction that would forever pass down in the memories of the Wizarding World as the most disastrous murder of magical beings since the medieval Witch burnings – had been nothing more ... than his celebration.

In the end, those who had survived ... would rather, have not.

Commentary: An Additional Note

Now, before you tell me that Voldemort had no reason to attack Were, seeing as he hates muggles, not wizards, please calm down, and be patient. There is a reason; there is always a reason. It will be revealed in time - granted, a lot of time - but I have hinted at it ... I think once, a while ago in passing. So, please do not review about how this chapter does not make sense. It does. But you will have to wait.

Sorry if I seemed a little ... tense about that. I just didn't want to deal with any pointless reviews. Now, of any of you really want to know why Voldemort attacked Were, say so in a review and I will reply with a PM telling you. It isn't exactly a secret, per say, I would just rather reveal it dramatically later in the plot - however, if your curiosity cannot wait several weeks, months or however long it will take to get there, I am more than willing to spill now. It is not crucial to the plot, and it is not a ground-breaking spoiler. It's just another quirky moment in this strange, strange story.

That is all. :)

Chapter Seven: Aftermath

Harry stood in the centre of the scarred, blackened, defeated street, looking out over a horizon he shouldn't have been able to see, a dawn that should have been cloaked by buildings and chimneys and all manner of things that weren't there any more. He didn't know whether to cry, laugh, sob, throw his fists around in mindless anger – or simply push it all away, as he had done countless, countless times before, and stand there. Numb.

Forever.

He sighed, lowered his eyes, then trained his wand on a still-smoking pillar of wood from Freya's place, levitating it off yet another still body – he would not cry, he would not, he couldn't, not here, not now – and back into place. Behind him, Jonas worked at a similar pace with his second-hand wand, while Sarah – her's new like Harry's and Andrew's had been, as they had both been destined for more studious futures than Jonas – worked with Lily at putting out the fires Devon's home had succumbed to. The mysterious man was dead; his charred body found next to his partner's, wrapped in one last embrace before the end.

There were so many dead. So much destruction, so much wrong with the world, Harry couldn't even begin to fathom it.

It had been by luck, pure luck, that they had escaped unscathed. Their home had not, the third and half of the second layer blasted away in a spell that had frightened them all to near death somewhere in the fourth hour of the morning. But they, all of them, were alive.

Which was more than could be said of the rest of their street. Hell – the rest of their suburb.

Every single house on the opposite side of the thin stone path, had been burnt. The houses on either side of the Potter residence were blasted into nothingness, the rest smashed or buckled or torn into strips.

When morning had finally come for them, when the raid had finally dwindled even though the Mark remained, Harry had been the first

to rise, pushing the singed table off and staggering into the mess the kitchen had become.

He knew exactly why they had survived while the others did not. Thus the reasoning behind his quandary. To laugh or to cry; laugh, that his magic had finally done something right ... or cry, that it had refused even then, to let him die as his friends and neighbors around him had. That it let him survive to see what his home had become. That it had let him live.

James approached the lone teen, his hand falling gently onto the thin shoulder. Harry turned his head, to look up at the taller man, his eyes impossibly empty.

"Harry—"

Harry didn't let him continue. He couldn't. Instead, he turned, his arms rising for the first hug he and his father had shared in months, and bent his head into James' shoulder, his eyes pressed tightly shut as his breath began to shake and fail him.

"-rry," Harry gasped softly. "I'm sorry, Dad, I'm so sorry, I shouldn't – I shouldn't've—"

James gently wrapped his arms in return around the thin teenager, one hand holding his shoulders tightly, the other carding through his son's hair in comfort.

"It's okay, Harry," James breathed. "I don't blame you, any of you. It's me who should be sorry."

Harry shook his head, unable to answer; unsure of exactly what he had been begging for. Was it forgiveness for his behavior, these past two months? Or ... was it forgiveness for that night, for his magic, for everything? For surviving?

In the end ... standing there, holding one another silently in the wake of devastation ... he guessed, that it didn't really matter.

Nothing mattered. Not anymore.

"It is, truly, a, hm, terrible loss – er, we are, of course, doing all that we, uh, possibly could," Fudge grimaced winningly at the press, who

were clicking and flashing and scribbling away. "The, um, destruction of Were is a tragedy that will never be, eh, forgotten, and we – the, uh, the Ministry, that is – will be ... will be doing everything we can to help those families, the families that were – uh ... unfortunate enough to be in ... uh, Were at the time of the attack."

"Minister, what are your words about the return of He Who Must Not Be Named?" A faceless reporter smoothed between the sweating man's words.

"You-You-Know-Who? Oh – er, well, that – that is quite ... obvious," Fudge lied, twisting his bowler hat nervously. "We will ... that – that is, the Ministry will – be, erm, doing everything we can to, uh, find out if these – claims that the Dark Lord has re-returned, are, in fact ... real."

"Claims? Are you saying you believe these survivors may be lying? That the attack on Were was committed by a collection of criminals not under You-Know-Who's command?"

"I – uh, I can't say for sure but, but after, ahem, fifteen years, I believe that – erm, it is, very unlikely that You-Know-Who could have, uh, returned. But! But, uh, of course," Fudge glanced to the side, where one of his secretaries was glaring at him slightly. "If, it so turns out that You-Know-Who, is back, heh, we will, of course, do everything we can to, uh, pre ... prepare."

Searching the ruins of their own house, scattered over several hundred metres, mingling with the debris from countless others, was a tedious, heartbreaking job – but it had to be done. With the use of accio, levitation and countless reparo's, they had managed to gather the barest of necessities, salvage a shadow of the life they had had just a few hours before.

The third floor having been highest, and the worst struck, meant much of Harry's and Jonas' belongings were lost, or destroyed beyond redemption. Despite this, they still managed to save a handful of books, one bent quill, a broken jar Jonas had been filling with knuts and chocolate sickles, Harry's old gobstone collection, a cardboard box or two filled with mementos or birthday presents. Sarah and Andrew's room had been easier to find, seeing as it was not only closer to the ground, but only half as damaged; rather than being completely destroyed, the second level had been halved, with

the floor and lower parts of walls still actually in tact. Lily and James' bed, for example, was still perfectly whole ... but for the dust and stones that now littered the torn covers.

That first hour, since the attack, since the world had ended, was spent gathering those things they could, crying over artifacts they would have never glanced twice at before, holding and treasuring the simplest items that had survived.

Then, there were the real treasures, the things Lily would have been heartbroken to find they had lost. The photo albums, school certificates and awards, Andrew's letters from Hogwarts and even some old love notes James had written for her when they first started dating; she wept over each and every single one of these things when she found them hidden under piles of wood or stone, battered – but in tact.

As the sun slowly rose higher and the situation looked no better, they began to hear movements in the streets, hear voices calling, shouting spells and desperate names. At one point, they heard crying, a haunting, mourning sound, and their heads lowered in respect for the person – or, people – they knew were gone.

Finally, just as they were shrinking and tucking the last of what they could find into James' expanded pockets - it would have been no later than nine in the morning, if that - they heard footsteps, far closer than any had been before. Harry, crouching down as he siphoned ash off a gutter tray, looked up, his wand hanging deceptively loosely between his fingers. Sarah and Jonas had been collecting then repairing broken sheets of glass, and paused to stare at the approaching figure. From where she was standing in a slowly healing stone archway across the street, between the ruins of Numbers Twenty and Twenty-One, Lily turned and curled her fingers around her slim wand tightly. And James, sitting on the cracked steps to their ruined apartment as he gently wrapped the shrunken objects they had saved, slipped the last dice-sized box into his pocket and stood, cautiously approaching the unknown person with the hidden face.

All of them would be cautious for a very long time ... after that night.

"Who are you?" James didn't hesitate to pull his wand, holding it firmly and directing the trembling tip at the darkly clothed stranger.
"What business do you have here?"

The hood was drawn back, revealing greying brown hair and shadowed amber eyes.

"Lupin, Ministry Official – I'm here to search for and aid survivors. I'm sorry it has taken so long for us to find you, it is difficult to search the outskirts such as here. Are you and your family alright?" The voice was rasping, but kind, and his eyes passed over the family with deep-set sympathy.

James gasped, stepping towards the man who had clearly yet to recognize them.

"Remus?"

Lupin blinked.

"James?"

A more awkward reunion would not have been humanely possible.

"All the survivors are being grouped together in a location I believe was known as the stone courtyard?" Remus told the five Potters as the six of them walked through the streets of Were that had so far been cleared of rubble and bodies. It was truly a depressing scene for all of them, to see the places and ones they loved so much, reduced to so little. "The Prophet is taking names, so relatives and such can see if their loved ones have ... survived or not."

The Potters said nothing, walking in silence. It had finally begun to sink into them, just what their current situation was. They had no home, no where to sleep, what little money they had was in a goblin vault somewhere, their nearest point of access presently buried under a small mountain of ash. With the loose coins they'd managed to hunt down among the rubble, they had enough for maybe a meal or two, between the lot of them. Then that was it.

As much as the children had complained over the years, as much as the parents had sighed over their pay cheques ... they had to admit; things had never been as bad as they were now.

"Mum?" Sarah voiced shyly, gripping the too-long sleeves of the ash-stained coat she was wearing.

"Yes, sweetie?"

"What ... where are we gonna go tonight?"

Harry and Jonas looked up in vague interest; they too had been wondering on it, but hadn't the courage or voice to ask.

Lily sighed, and was about to open her mouth – to tell them that, truthfully, she herself had no idea – but Remus, the man her and James had last seen years and years ago as he stepped into an Order meeting, leaving them behind, spoke first.

"The Ministry, with the help of volunteers from the public, has set up some temporary housing for the citizens of Were, until other arrangements can be made," he smiled at them, the scars on his face not evident until they creased on his cheeks discretely. "We've managed to round up some House Elves, too, so you don't need to worry about food either. You look exhausted, all of you – it would be best if you were to head straight to the tents once you've given your names."

"And after?" James asked tensely. Things had been ... strange between him and Remus, neither of them sure of exactly how to act; whether to act as complete strangers, or as best friends – as though over a decade and a half hadn't passed since the last time they'd seen each other.

"The Ministry has offered complete cover of the damage ... though it will take time to rebuild, and I'm not sure you'd want to live here, anyway, after ..." Remus trailed off hesitantly. "After – this."

"Dad?" Jonas asked quietly from behind James and Remus, who were leading the others by a fair few metres. "Dad ... I don't ... I don't think I keep living here ... after."

"I know, Jonas," James sighed, without turning to see his second-eldest. "I hope not to stay here either. We'll see how things turn out, alright son? Who knows. Anything could happen. We'll just have to live with things as they turn out."

Jonas lowered his eyes and shuffled closer to Harry, who shyly stretched out his fingers to tighten around Jonas'. The movement was not commented on by either of the teenagers, nor would it ever be brought up again; but for the rest of the walk to the courtyard, the two walked at the rear of the group, side by side, not letting even when they finally saw the rows of white open-flapped tents and bustling officials in their pressed and folded robes.

And for one moment; everything was alright.

Until they rounded the last corner. And saw the bodies.

Thousands of them.

It was a scene none of the Potter would never, for all of their lives, forget.

Most had been laid out, in endless lines and rows and mounds with white sheets covering all but their faces, and in some cases – where it would have been too painful to show even this – the sheets extended to cover that, too. The rest – those dressed in the mask and robe of what could only be Death Eaters – had been thrown into broken, bloodied, cold, terrible piles, heaped over one another and twisted into grotesque shapes that would not have been physically possible had they not been cursed, or blasted, or torn into them.

The scene bled through their minds for only a second, however, before a hastily shot beam of purifying white light arced towards them, and then the vast, flattened plain – where once the most popular shopping destination of Were had sprawled – was faded into an illusion of mist, impenetrable and obscure.

Sarah whimpered, and pressed herself against her mother's side, who wrapped an arm around the twelve-year-old's shoulder comfortingly while her own, pale face streaked with tears through the dust and dirt.

"Ah! More survivors, I see!" a cheery man bounded over, his perfect appearance only contrasting depressingly with the Potter's own shaken, dirty, exhausted and defeated bodies. "Come right this way, my fellow wizards, we'll have you right, just after you've given your names to the lovely Jathilda down yonder. Have a good day!" And

with that, he bounded away; as if the street he walked wasn't cracked and stained with blood, as if the sky wasn't red and black with smoke, as if everything was perfect in the quaint little world of denial he lived in.

Harry shot a mild look of disgust towards the man, squeezed Jonas' hand one last time, then gently let it slide away as he moved up to stand on the opposite side of James to Remus.

"Dad?"

"Hm?"

"What about Andrew?" Harry's voice was quiet, almost nonexistent, but the underlying emotions in those words were not.

"Andrew?" Remus asked as he led them down the tents. Peering into the open tents as they passed, they could see families, individuals, groups of wounded or injured – none of them faces that they, personally, knew. Oh, they knew them by sight, some even by vague names; but as they neared the last of the tents, Harry's face began to flush as he realized he had not seen Vienna, or Zane, or Karl, or any of this classmates that he could recognize. They had lived closer to the centre of the city, closer to the courtyard, closer to the Door that led to the outside, muggle world.

Close to where the greatest damage had been struck.

Close to danger.

Close to death.

Breathing heavily, Harry didn't – couldn't – hear James' response to Lupin's question; he was too busy fumbling through his pockets to locate something – anything – that could calm him down. A photo, a potion, anything, before-

Too late.

"Mum," he whispered, his voice fading fast as his breath came quicker and quicker, his heart racing as the magic he had spent his entire life fighting to control suddenly sparked to life, roaring along his veins and enflaming his every nerve. His throat tightened, and he

could only manage one more, strangled word, before he felt it close off completely. "Mum."

She couldn't hear him.

No, no, no – not here, not after everything, please – Mum!

He had stopped, control over his betraying limbs all but lost, and though slowly fading eyes he could see that they had moved on without him. Tiny flat pebbles of rubble began to tremble on the ground beside his feet, tiny slivers of blood dripped inexplicably from beneath his fingernails, a woman whose arm was covered in tight, white bandages gasped when the water she was holding suddenly boiled.

They hadn't noticed, they hadn't heard him, he couldn't stop it, something was going to happen, something bad – panic rushed through him, panic that did nothing to solve his problem, merely fuel it like gasoline on a house fire. It's never been this bad before, never, please, please – turn around, please!

The last thing he saw before the magic finally dimmed the last of the dark, shadowed scene, was a glimmer of red hair as Lily turned; having seen, at last, that Harry was not with them-

"Harry!" Ignoring Remus as he paused and stared, ignoring James as he paled, and moved to shield the two younger children, Lily hurried to her eldest son's side, tipping his head back and shoving something thin with the texture of glass between his lips. Too lost to do anything but the involuntary response, Harry automatically swallowed the bitter, but familiar liquid that gushed into his mouth, dimly recognizing it as one of the strongest calming droughs they had – one that Lily kept at all times shrunken around her neck, just in case. They'd rarely found reason to use it before, not since Andrew had fallen ill with dragon pox. It's too much ... he whispered to himself, as he realized the liquid had stopped coming not because the bottle had been taken away, but because the bottle was empty.

"Harry, talk to me, Harry!" Lily shook him lightly, slapping his cheek quickly and closing her eyes when he did not respond. His eyes were glazed, a duller green than she had ever seen on him before, and he was paling fast.

"James! Get over here, now!"

James hurried forward – seeing that the danger had passed – and arrived seconds before Harry wavered, the potion finally overriding what little control it had taken to remain upright. He caught the thin teenager with ease, wincing when he saw the slack, yet saddened look on Harry's face.

"Oh, Harry," he whispered, hefting him up for a better grip and sighing as he started back towards Remus – who had watched the entire scene with a look stuck between polite curiosity and concern.

"James? What's wrong with him?" he asked as they finally approached, Lily casting spells at the barely-conscious teen to display his lowered heart-rate and magical disposition – thankfully, now under control.

"It's ... complicated," James looked down at the dark head resting on his shoulder, reluctantly turning back to Remus and motioning with his head to continue. "I believe you were showing us to our tents?"

Jonas sat beside Harry's bed in the magically expanded tent, looking down at his unconscious brother's face in worry. It had been a long time, years, since it had been this bad. He hated seeing Harry like this; Harry was supposed to be strong, resilient and ... well, not unconscious in a transfigured camping bed, for a start.

Sighing, he stood cautiously, glancing over at Sarah – who was also keeping watch over their older brother – then moved to the door that separated the room from the central part of the tent.

"Where're you going?" Sarah asked glumly from where she was curled up on one of the many fold-away chairs, too depressed and worried to crawl into the other bed opposite Harry's.

"To find Louise."

Sarah shifted her eyes to him briefly, acknowledging him before moving to take his chair closer to Harry.

"Do you want me to tell you good luck?"

"No. It won't ... change anything. Either I'll find her ... or I won't. Luck doesn't have anything to do with it."

Sarah's eyes softened.

"I'll say it anyway. Good luck."

Jonas didn't answer; moving through to the main room of the tent, where James and Lily were taking stock of what they had managed to save and already filling in forms the Officials had shared among the survivors.

"Mum? Dad?" Jonas announced his arrival uncertainly.

"Hm?" Lily didn't look up from the parchment she wrote on. Jonas ran his eyes over her face; she looked exhausted. Her long hair was duller than usual, and pulled back with a sloppy tie. Her eyes were shadowed ... but then again, all of their eyes were.

"I'm going to find Louise."

That did make her look up.

"Louise? Your teacher?"

"Yeah ... y'know, she's only been my master for the past two years," Jonas' voice was as sarcastic as he could muster. Which wasn't very.

Lily shot him a washed-out attempt at her patented 'look' and nodded towards the open-wall flap, where officials and survivors and Healers rushed past, even while that white, obscuring mist hung menacingly in the background – the memories of what lay behind still burned fresh, like a brand, into their minds.

"Go, then. I expect you back in an hour ... no longer than two."

Jonas didn't comment on the new curfew – usually, their parents let them run throughout Were as long as they desired, as long as it wasn't night. Which, now, it clearly wasn't. Instead, he nodded and turned, entering the fray with nothing more than a wince as he passed through the sound barriers built into the walls of the canvas tents.

Glancing first to one side, then the other, he set out – a determined look on his youthful face as he searched for the one who had given him meaning beyond what school and grades and lessons had once posed for him.

Andrew was sitting down to yet another complete breakfast, not quite hungry yet from the Hallowe'en feast just the night before, but still a little famished. The food here at Hogwarts was so much better than the stuff Mum made ... even if he had been a little reluctant to admit it at first. And the library! Merlin, he could live here his entire life, if just for the library, it was amazing! A whole wing of rooms and alcoves and hundreds of shelves ... if Neil and their new Hufflepuff friend, Gemara, didn't drag him out by his ears, he would never leave.

A fluttering of owls; post was here. And with it, should be coming the letter from Mum.

Andrew sighed.

Things had been ... strange between his family and him ever since he started Hogwarts, and he knew why, he even understood. He wasn't like the rest of them, not any more. While they lived in near poverty, he was here, in this magnificent castle, living the high life. Of course that wouldn't see eye-to-eye any more. But, he couldn't help but feel regret, every time he read whatever new, awkward words his mother would scribble off for him.

He remembered, wistfully, that look on Harry's face when he said goodbye. The way he ruffled his hair when he got home from school. The way he used to play with him and Jonas and Sarah when they were younger. But that was all – before. Before Hogwarts. Before everything.

Neil, sitting next to him with his curly head propped up on his bent arm, was picking out a handful of knuts from a pouch his parents had gifted him with and handing them to the owl that hopped before him impatiently. Andrew didn't know why Neil read the Prophet, he really didn't. In his opinion, it was just a waste of sickles and galleons, galleons that could have gone towards food or new clothes or ...

Again; he sighed. He really needed to break himself out of that ... money-saving habit of his. He was a Hogwarts student now. He need never worry about money ever again.

"Andrew?" Neil's voice was ... strange. He'd never heard that tone of voice before.

"Yeah, Neil?" Andrew didn't look up from where he was drizzling copious amounts of golden syrup over his stacked pancakes.

"You ... you should ... look at this," Neil's voice grew softer, quieter, until he could barely be heard over the slowly rising whispers around them; just as Neil was opening his Daily Prophet, so was the rest of the Hogwarts population.

"What's-?" Andrew looked over.

No.

He looked down at the thin, slightly crumpled paper, his dark eyes widening in disbelief.

He'd never told his friends in Slytherin just where he'd come from; somehow, it had never arisen. The name 'Zabini' had rung a few bells, pulled a few whistles, and sufficiently assured them that he was not, at least, a muggleborn ... but now, that wouldn't be enough. Not enough to hide his reaction to ... this.

"Blaise? You look a little pale there ... something wrong?"

Draco.

"I ... I need – to," he wasn't making sense, and he knew it. Without offering any sort of explanation or excuse, he pushed his bench back, stumbling over it with the paper crushed in his hand, and began to storm his way up to the front table; his shadowed eyes beginning to brim with unshed tears.

Mum.

Six students ran to the teacher's table, their eyes widened with pain and loss and impossible hope as they each held in their hands undeniable proof that-

Professor Dumbledore looked up, his eyes too echoing pain. He stood, tapping his throat and muttering a charm that would allow for all of the panicked hall to hear him:

"Students, if you could please return to your dormitories; teachers, and those of you with relatives from Were, please assemble at the front of the Hall. That is all." His voice was heavy, heavier than any there had heard it before, and silence reigned for a long moment in the Great Hall before hundreds of children surged from their seats, gossip and cries and words of fear spilling from their mouths as they left.

In the end, the entire faculty, the original six students to have stormed on the head table and an additional nine boys and girls who had not moved from their seats, remained.

Dumbledore looked over them all.

And he could see quite clearly ... this would be a painful day, a sorrowful week, and a nightmare for them all.

Professor Sirius Black, the Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, had taken note of Andrew Potter's name as he was sorted; he had spent a moment, or perhaps two, to look over him in class, and had acknowledged his similarities with both mother and father, before moving onto the others in his First Year lesson.

After all; Andrew Potter was just the son of an old friend, someone he had fallen out with long ago. Nothing to break into song and dance over.

But at that announcement – that article in the Prophet, that knowledge that James might not be alive – something sparked in him, something he hadn't felt since that day Albus had told him the young couple was not joining the proud Order.

It was fear. Fear for his friend and his lovely wife, worry about what might had become of them. And longing; longing to make sure they were alright, longing to see them, longing to ... to ...

Sirius closed his eyes. James had never been the best at Defense; his talent had always been in Transfiguration. There was no chance ... that he would have survived. None at all.

He looked over his once-best friend's son, Andrew, and winced at the memories that befell him when he took in those features that were so similar to Lily, yet with a masculine twist that was all James.

And for the first time, in decades ... he regretted what had become of their friendship. He regretted letting them drift away. He regretted

...

... everything.

"I know all of you are concerned for your families," Dumbledore said in the smoothest, calmest voice he could manage, facing the fifteen students with relatives living in Were – five of whom had, in fact, lived in Were themselves. "But it is too dangerous for me to allow you to visit there just yet."

"But Headmaster-!" a seventh year Hufflepuff was cut off by a single raised hand on Albus' behalf.

"I know you are upset – but all we can do, it wait for the lists of survivors to be announced in tomorrow's Daily Prophet. If your families are alive, I promise, I will do everything I can to cater for them, even take them in if I have to. I will allow them to board here, in Hogwarts, for as long as they need until they can get back on their feet."

"And if they're dead? What then, Headmaster." Blaise's eyes were burning.

"They I offer you my deepest condolences, and we will adjust accordingly so the remainder of your education here can go as smoothly as possible," Dumbledore replied diplomatically, before turning to where the pale-faced teachers were still sitting. "Now, if any of you wish to come with me and volunteer your services in aiding the people of Were, please do so. Classes will be cancelled today, if the Heads of Houses would be so kind as to inform their students?"

"Of course, Albus," Minerva replied in an admittedly shaky voice, adjusting her peaked hat before rising and stepping from the hall along with the three other Heads of Houses.

Andrew was a bundle of nerves and tears that next morning, and his fellow students who had also come from, or knew of Were were no better. They sat apart from the other students for breakfast, and had been excused from lessons for the remaining three days of the week, including that day. A long table had been set up for them and three supervising, sympathetic teachers in an unused hall near the kitchens. They ate in stone cold silence.

Waiting. All of them waiting, tense and alert, for the sound of wings. The morning paper, and with it the so-far confirmed lists of survivors ... and casualties.

Poppy Pomfrey, sitting at the head of the table and the designated speaker to call out names of those lucky, and unlucky, was also clenched in anticipation. Her own cousin, Herbology genius Louise Pomfrey, had lived in Were for the last three years. The intended stay of just over seven months had been extended with the unexpected discovery of her apprentice. Every Master in every subject was destined in their field to one apprentice, and one apprentice only; whether they found that apprentice or not was due purely to chance.

That Louise had found hers was nothing short of a miracle.

Her letters had spoken of little but the boy; the bond between a Master and their apprentice was something only they could describe, something similar to parenthood yet in a slightly more formal manner, something where the knowledge imparted was gold in both their eyes and to be treasured forever.

Poppy had been happy for Louise, yet still envious that the woman ten years her younger had found what all Masters sought for most in the world, before her.

Now, however, that happiness had turned to dread.

Had finding her apprentice ... had staying in Were because of it ... been the cause of what the previous war had not? Had finding this boy, and lingering because of it, killed her?

Before she could pursue the matter any further, however, a single owl stumbled through the painfully open windows, stuttering to a stop before her.

Fingers trembling, aware of the pleading, pain-filled eyes fixed on her every movement, she detangled the paper and gently slipped three knuts into the leather pouch.

Ignoring the owl as it soared away, she opened the paper and flipped directly to the page she, and all of them, were dreading.

Commentary: Pomfrey and Panic Attacks

For those of you who might be interested to know, Poppy and Louise Pomfrey will be playing a much larger role in this fanfiction than in canon; Poppy, in the sense that she will be much closer to the Potters in a way that I will reveal with time, and Louise because – obviously – she is an Original Character and has nothing to do with canon whatsoever. Ten points to whoever figures out what Poppy's role in this story will be – the foreshadowing was ... rather obvious, in my opinion, though I won't hold it against you if you miss it.

Also, a reviewer commented on Harry's behaviour, falling victim to panic attacks and what-not, and being far weaker than one would suspect from his ability. Now, I know that Harry does suffer from a lot of panic attacks, but it is only to be expected, and while they may be quite frequent in the beginning (... glances at above and previous chapters), they will ease off towards the end as Harry unlocks more and more of his magical core, thus reducing the risk of Accidental Magic. Are we cool with that?

Chapter Eight: Hogwarts

Blaise had ignored the looks of his peers and friends in Slytherin, that night before, as they discovered for the first time that their friend of five years was not nearly as wealthy or well-to-do as they thought he was. He could see the indecision in their eyes; should they taunt him, as they all had taunted the paupers or slumdogs ... or should they comfort him, in light of his loss? Should they shun him, when he needed companionship and support most, or let him know in their own, Slytherin way that they were there for him?

Harry. Oh, Merlin, Harry. They'd barely known each other – barely even been friends – but he was the closest thing he had to a childhood companion, alone in the magically silenced rooms his mother owned and operated. He had shunned him, in the most recent years; he had allowed the words and spiteful sneers of his friends to sway his mind, lead him to believe that he was better than them because he went to Hogwarts, while they did not.

When Harry – hopeful as ever, even with the blank look of knowledge that was ever-present in the teen's eyes – had come over to him just weeks before and asked him to watch over Andrew as the poor family finally scrambled together enough money to front the enormous Hogwarts fees ... Blaise had brushed him off, as nothing but a nuisance; an insect beneath his boot, a smudge of dirt on the knees of his slacks, a worm struggling it's way through the filth it lived in.

"You'd do well to remember, Zabini, that you were one of those commoners yourself, not that long ago."

Blaise ran a hand over his eyes and turned to Pomfrey as she unfurled the paper and, with a trembling voice, scanned the names and read aloud those who had survived.

Zabini; Zed, the last letter of the alphabet. He was in for a long wait, the longest of them all.

But if she wasn't there ... if his mother wasn't on that list, if she wasn't ... alive ...

A glance of pain shot through his chest. Remembering every time he had snubbed her when she asked how school had gone. Every time

he had turned down the invitation to return home over the holidays. Every time he had ignored the hopeful letters she sent, every time he had scorned the cheap gifts she sent him, every time he had seen pain in her eyes when he stepped onto that train every September ... and how every single time, he not cared in the slightest.

Mother ... I have wronged you. Please. Please, let you be alive ... so that you might forgive me.

Of the fifteen students and three teachers with relations or histories within the Were ... fourteen left the room in tears.

The one remaining teacher left with the look of one who had dodged the Killing Curse by inches; Poppy. She's alive. Injured ... unconscious ... but alive.

Only three students left the room with tears of happiness – that none, not one, of their beloved, had fallen – streaking their faces.

Daniel Mustar, a fifth year from Gryffindor, whose cousin had been staying with her friend for the weekend. Saved by a fallen arch that cut her off from both her friend's family, and the approaching Death Eaters.

Kasey Reeds, second year Hufflepuff with an Uncle and two brothers working at a small magical factory packing and distributing potions ingredients. The younger of the brothers tortured, but sane; the older trapped in his basement, unable to do more than sob and listen to his brother's cries; the Uncle hidden in his warded stockroom for the entire ordeal, unscathed.

And Andrew Potter, the only one of the five Hogwarts children raised in the Were, whose parents and brothers and sisters were alive.

Protected by some spell or curse that none of the officials, professionals or spellweavers alike had been able to understand, let alone replicate. But that had protected them nonetheless. Harry.

Of the other four students who had lived in Were, two had suffered a partial loss; the loss of one parent, yet not the other, or the loss of both yet the survival of a sibling. Those survivors, without homes for an undetermined amount of time, had been extended welcome by

the Headmaster to rest in the Guest Wing of Hogwarts for as long as they needed to recuperate.

The third student had lost everyone – mother, father and younger sister – and had officially been made a ward of the state, her fate falling to a Will that would be read in a few weeks' time.

And the last, Blaise Zabini of Slytherin, had lost the only family member even he had known, his mother; and with her, all knowledge of who, or where his father might have been.

Mrs Zabini did not have a Will; any documents or heirlooms that might have been left for Blaise had burned with the brothel and conjoined house. He had no next of kin. He had no relations of any kind whatsoever. He had only a well-stocked vault deep under Diagon Alley – Mrs Zabini's business had been a popular one, for all that her wares were outrageously expensive, as it had a notorious reputation as the best – and the clothes on his back. No home. Nowhere to go. His seventeenth birthday was in just two months, he was the oldest in his year after Granger, so he would be considered a fully fledged adult by the time school was out. Thus the Ministry declared no need for a, however temporary, guardian.

Andrew had glanced at the dark-skinned boy as he passed; sympathetic, yet wary of the somewhat aggressive boy he had seen around town in his childhood, the boy Harry had brought home one tense night only to never be seen again.

The first year's thoughts and heart briefly went to the others, who had lost what he himself had feared to lose, but barely a minute later a beaming smile overtook his sorrow as he followed Professor Dumbledore to his office, alongside Daniel and Kasey, where they would be granted a brief visit with their surviving family at the campsite built among the ruins of Were.

Andrew was ... apprehensive at the thought of seeing his family again – things had seemed so tense between them in the latest letters – but still overjoyed at the thought of it; he wasn't heartless, after all, and he did miss them terribly.

The portkey was set to go off in ten minutes; he, Daniel, Kasey, Dumbledore and five other teachers, including Madame Pomfrey, that had volunteered to help. They were gathered around the long

metal fire poker, their fingers gingerly brushing against it as the seconds ticked down.

Andrew, the youngest of them all, was perhaps the happiest; the only reason for this being that he was the most ignorant of what was to come. The most innocent.

He had no idea what he was in for.

No idea at all.

"Portkey at six o'clock! Everyone, back away!" a robust woman bellowed, and the various passerby's and hanger-about's drew back from the indicated area as if repelled by an invisible force, leaving a visibly defined area to be avoided as a growing pinprick of light indicated the impending arrival.

Then with a dull phwump! and a good deal of stumbling, falling and cussing, the small party arrived in the destruction – the spell to obscure the mass of bodies and rubble cast quickly and expertly on the children.

"Louise," Poppy muttered immediately, dropping the metal poker and moving swiftly through the crowds, following their motions to the tents – stepping around overlooked rubble whenever it crossed her path, avoiding a deep crack that had yet to heal. It took her five minutes to find Louise's name on the register, and a further ten to hunt down the tent that held her. It was shared with three other lone witches to have survived, all of them injured in some way or another.

But what the register hadn't told her was of the tall, tanned and dark-haired boy with wide hazel eyes that stood over her beloved cousin.

Shock overcame the busy-body nature of the school nurse, and she paused to take note of the strange boy who had inhabited her cousin's space. He looked to be in his early teens, thin as a stick, wearing admittedly scruffy clothes – though that was no wonder, what with the carnage she had witnessed outside she doubted the boy had had time to change from the clothes worn during the attack. His eyes were wary, and one roughened and dirt-streaked hand was holding Louise's gently, as if it were a fragment of fragile glass about to break.

He looked exhausted. No ... devastated.

Louise was no better; her own skin was abnormally pale and streaked with dirt and remnants of blood not yet washed away. Her walnut hair had finally begun to grey in the last year since she'd seen her, and Poppy easily glimpsed the newest creases framing her eyes. She looks older than thirty-five, Poppy sighed, stepping closer.

The boy's eyes followed her.

"Hello," she said in her best bed-side voice, her calming tones well-practiced on angsting teenagers. "I'm Poppy Pomfrey, Louise's cousin. And you might be ...?"

His eyes traced her movements as she moved to sit beside Louise and touch the unconscious woman's forehead gently. Hm. Not too warm, although she could do with a fever reducer ...

"Jonas."

His abrupt introduction caught her off guard, and she looked up sharply.

"Jonas? Oh, the apprentice I've been hearing so much of," Poppy smiled, finally recognizing the relationship between the two before her. "She thinks very highly of you. You're a right prodigy, according to our Louise."

Jonas didn't offer any reply, nor any other sort of recognition for the remainder of their shared visit. Minutes passed slowly, as Poppy ran though everything she'd been told of the boy; even while assessing her cousin's condition in a second-nature sort of way.

Jonas.

Jonas.

Oh. Potter.

Damn.

"You wouldn't happen to be any relation to Andrew Potter, would you?" she asked suddenly. He jumped a little, his eyes widening in a way she was uncomfortably familiar with; the remnants of the raids in the first war.

"Y-Yes, he's my brother."

"Then he is no doubt looking for you, Jonas."

His dark eyes processed that thought for a second, then two, then-

"What! He's here?" And with that, he surged from his seat, sprang for the door and was gone sooner than Poppy could think to stop him. Not that she would have.

Now was no time to be keeping families apart.

Her fingers sought Louise's and stroked gently.

No. It most certainly was not.

"Andy!" Jonas gasped as he finally burst through the open entrance to the plain white tent, his eyes immediately zeroing in on the small auburn-haired boy still dressed in his Hogwarts uniform. The eleven-year-old turned, his eyes wide and almost burning with relief.

"Jona'! You're okay!" he cried, running forward and thumping into Jonas' chest as the older boy hugged him back just as tight.

Jonas closed his eyes as he leant into the embrace with the smaller, younger boy, ignoring the way his mother and father smiled wearily from their places at the thin, transfigured table.

"Did you find her?"

"Yeah, just this morning," Jonas smiled in tired relief at his mother, who also sighed and leant forward to the table, thankful that they had not lost the proud woman. When Jonas had come back the afternoon before, five minutes after the curfew she set him, she knew he had not found her; but also knew he would not stop looking until he did.

"Thank Merlin," Lily murmured, before turning back to Jonas, Andrew finally slipping out from the teen's hold. "Did you see anyone else? Any – anyone we know?" She was almost afraid to ask; but she had to know, she had to.

"I saw ... I saw Felix on the way there. He said he was out of town for the night at a conference in St Mungos. I found my fifth year P.E. Teacher, but ..." Jonas swallowed. "They ... aren't sure he's gonna make it. Oh! And – I saw Maria, that chick who sold muggle band-shirts near the Door. I think she was a year above Harry in ..." His memory lurched, and his throat dried suddenly; he licked his lips nervously before continuing. "Harry ... Mum? How ... how is Harry?"

Andrew looked up at him, concerned.

"What? Is something wrong with ... oh." Andrew realized what must have happened; he wasn't a Ravenclaw for nothing. "He ... did, did something happen with ... him?"

Lily stood, leaving James alone to sort through the various forms and claims they were to make, and moved to touch Andrew's shoulders gently.

"Nothing happened, Andy," she soothed gently. "I ... I got there before anything could happen."

Andrew knew ... he knew what that must have meant. And paled.

"Is he okay?"

Jonas moved past the two of them, heading for the door to the room Harry and Sarah's beds were in, pushing the fabric back.

Sarah was still sitting at the unconscious teen's side, her hand stroking the covers gently as she watched his chest rise and fall softly. Jonas could feel Andrew at his back, heard his shallow gasp, and they both moved to allow Lily past them as she drew her wand for a diagnosis charm.

The glowing light sent a handful of words, numbers and coloured lines to hover over him, and Lily sighed even as Jonas and Andrew stepped into the room behind her, the elder pulling up the only other

available chair leaving Andrew to sit hesitantly on the end of Harry's bed.

She lowered her wand, and the words faded.

"Mum? Is he alright?"

The others looked up at Sarah's question.

Lily searched Harry's face for a sign, anything. But found nothing. I'm not qualified enough for this. What we need is Felix – he'd know what to do ...

"I don't know," she shook her head. "The dose was strong ... the strongest we've ever used. I – I may have given him too ... much ... I'm beginning to think it was ... a bit too strong ..." She turned to Jonas. "You said you saw Felix on your way to Louise's tent?"

"Yeah ... but-" his eyes widened as he realized what she was trying to ask. Oh shit. It must be bad if we need him ... "-but he looked really busy. He's helping as one of the Healers ... I don't think-

Louise. Louise ... Pomfrey. Poppy Pomfrey.

Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry's own Healer.

"Mum! Wait right here – I think I know someone who can help!" Jonas cried as he leapt from his seat and ran from the tent, startling James enough to send his quill tearing through the thin, delicate parchment he was signing.

"Merlin, Jonas, slow down! You kids'll give me a heart attack one day, I swear you will!" James shouted after him, but his words were lost in the noise of the moving crowd Jonas had once again become a part of.

Louise said her cousin was a Healer, one of the best there was ... maybe ... maybe she can ...

"Poppy!" Jonas gasped as he ran into the tent he had last seen the school Healer, relieved to find her still sitting beside the comatose herbologist. "Poppy, I need your help."

"What is it?" Poppy half-rose from her chair, recognizing the signs of desperation and truth in the boy's face. She barely knew him, but ... she knew he wouldn't have come if it wasn't bad. If it wasn't desperate. If she wasn't needed.

"It's ... my brother – look, can I explain on the way? I don't think ... I don't know what's wrong with him, but the Healer we usually have to look out for him – he's–"

"I'll come," Poppy announced, rising and patting down her white Healer's robes, hurrying after the impatient boy. "What's wrong?"

By the time they reached the Potter's tent ... Poppy wasn't sure if she was glad she'd asked ... or horrified.

Poppy sighed as she leant back.

"I don't have any of my potions or textbooks with me ... otherwise this'd be far easier for me to deal with," she told Lily – the only one to remain in the room after the nurse's arrival. "You were right – the potion was too strong for him, and at the levels you gave him ... It certainly did the trick in stabilizing him ... however you may have inadvertently pushed Harry here into a mild form of Sleeping Death."

Lily closed her eyes and took a small, trembling breath.

"The potion you gave him was only a few degrees short of the Drought of Living Death, one of the strongest – legal – calming potions available to the public ... did the Healer who gave this to you give you any advice about what to do after ingestion?"

Lily shook her head.

"No, only that we should send for him immediately. It's ... always been one of our last resorts. I – I should have used one of the standard potions, but I panicked and–"

"No, Lily–" Poppy remembered the red-haired woman from her own school days at Hogwarts, "-you can't blame yourself for this. You only did what was normal for a scared mother, in fact you may have saved his life, or the lives of the injured that were recuperating around him; there is no guarantee that, had you given him a weaker

calming drought, it would have worked – and if it hadn't, even the weaker magical backlash could have disrupted the fragile healing of a nearby survivor.

"The point is, Lily, you can't think of what might have happened, or what could happen, just focus on this, here. Harry is alright; he is going to be fine, if a little woozy for a week or so after he wakes up–"

"Which will be when?" Lily interrupted desperately.

Poppy sighed and tucked her wand up her sleeve.

"I measured the residue of the potion yet to be absorbed by his system and ... by the looks of things, given the right antidote, he'll sleep for a few days, a week at most. What I'm concerned most about is his upkeep ... making sure he has regular meals, keeps clean, those sorts of things. Do you have anywhere to go? Somewhere to stay, perhaps? A friend, a family member?"

Lily's head had been shaking since the first question, and hadn't stopped.

"No one," Lily murmured. "James was an only child, my sister is ... unapproachable ... our parents passed away many years ago – a ... any friend we might have here is, obviously–" she hiccuped gently, "- in no state to take us in, we don't have any savings left after paying tuition for Andrew to attend Hogwarts, I don't –" she hiccuped again, this time accompanied by a single tear. "I don't know what we're going to do–"

Poppy moved forward and gently rubbed Lily's shoulder, speaking again in her calming tones.

"Lily, dear, I don't know if Albus has approached you yet, but–"

"Lily," James called softly from the other room, prodding his head through the closed flap and gazing at her with dark, serious eyes. "Lily, Dumbledore's here – he wants to talk to us."

Wiping away the smallest tears that had escaped her, Lily smiled at Poppy in thanks, and the two of them followed James into the main room; the younger curious, and the older thankful that the esteemed Headmaster had followed through with his promises.

Apparently, he wasn't one of the most influential men in the world for nothing.

A quick family meeting (minus Harry) was orchestrated by James, as they shortly discussed the opportunity presented to them by Dumbledore.

It was an option he was extending to all family members of Hogwarts students who had been affected by the attack on Were; the option to, effectively, live in Hogwarts for as long as it took until they were back on their feet, able to live out on their own again. Thus, giving them time to recover from any injuries or scars they might have taken, and in the company of their child or children all the while.

Andrew was eager, and wasn't afraid to show it; since attending Hogwarts he had really come out of his shell, Jonas and Sarah noted absently. Once upon a time, he would have nodded, blushed and hidden back into himself, waiting for the others to decide without him. Now he was just about jumping out of his seat in his eagerness to share his opinion; the difference between him and the boy they had once known was startling.

Sarah was ... of two minds. On one hand, she too was anticipating the sight she had thought to never see; the rolling greens of the grounds, the deep forests, the crystal lake and towering castle she had heard of over, and over, and over in the the fairy-tales of her childhood. Nothing would soothe her heart more, she knew, than to live there in the cold of Scotland where there was no one and nothing for miles and miles around save mountains and acres of empty land ...

But, on the other hand ... that would mean facing everything she'd, in the last month, come to hate.

Hogwarts itself.

Well, not so much hate; rather ... loathe, for the fact that it had taken one of her siblings, her closest one, while leaving her and her two elder brothers to fend for themselves simply because they weren't as blessed as others were.

What a ridiculous way to fashion a society ... where only the rich are given the means to get richer.

Jonas, meanwhile, accepted on one condition, and one condition only.

"Is Louise going?"

Poppy, from where she was standing behind Dumbledore quaintly, smiled.

"I am her last living relative," she told her cousin's young apprentice. "So, for as long as it takes for her to recover from the blood curse, she will be living with me in my quarters by the Hospital Wing."

"I'm for it, then," Jonas leant back, as if that had decided everything and all that was left was for the adults to make the arrangements.

James and Lily glanced at each other, and smiled.

It was soon decided that the Potters would be taking residence within the castle of Hogwarts, in a small private collection of rooms – essentially an apartment within the castle, almost a whole wing of its own – along with four other Were survivors who had decided to join them in the hospitality. The rooms were located on the third floor, just two corridors from the Hospital Wing, and comprised of a broad central sitting room with individual suites and a handful of shared bedrooms and bathrooms through stone corridors or, in some cases, staircases.

The rooms were decorated sparingly, with the barest of furniture and neutral colours, but as James commented when they were left alone to settle in, it was a damn side better than what they would have had; that is, nothing.

As he drew his wand and expanded the handful of boxes they had saved from the rubble, James smiled at the newest memories the family had made.

Jonas and Sarah's first sight of Hogwarts as they stepped from the carriages, Lily's face when they stepped through the tall front doors, the abnormal quietness of the open corridors while brief murmurs of conversation washed over them every time they passed one of the

many occupied classrooms. They'd never walked these paths while class was still in session; it was a strange experience that reminded them only that they were grown now, and no longer a part of that culture they had once been.

Yet, still; as he unpacked the last box and cast his eye to where Harry was sleeping deeply, James felt as if his soul were breathing the deepest sigh of relief.

Even after all these years ... Hogwarts still felt like home.

Commentary: Hmm

I developed a very nasty case of 'Exams' while I was writing this part of the story, so please excuse me if it seems dumber than usual. I used up all my brain points attempting to describe the reproduction methods of various species of plant. (Later Edit: Figures that Plants would be the only paper I failed that year.)

Chapter Nine: Settling In

When Andrew stepped into the Great Hall that night, he hurried to his normal seats at the Ravenclaw table and found Neil quickly – having remembered some way through the day that he'd forgotten to tell his friend where he was heading that morning, or that he would be helping his family settle in that afternoon.

"Neil!" he called out softly as he lowered himself briefly onto the bench beside him. The boy, who had been musing over a half-full plate of cottage pie until then, jumped slightly and glanced to his side, turning fully when he saw – to his relief – the red-headed Potter.

"Andrew, where have you been?" Neil tore into him immediately, waving an unladen fork in his direction angrily. "You could have at least told me you were going to play rookie, I went to ask at the Hospital Wing but no one was there, so I knew you weren't off sick and–"

"Neil, calm down," Andrew advised his friend in a quiet voice – a voice he always got around large groups of people, no matter how much Hogwarts had managed to deaden his shyness thus far. "I was with my family, that's all."

"Your ..." Neil's eyes widened as he realized what that must have meant. "You mean – they're alive–"

"Yep!" Andrew's face was the very definition of relief, and those around them – a handful of fourth years and one of their fellow first years – couldn't help but smile, having been unable to help themselves from listening into the ... revealing conversation.

After all, the students from Were had been the talk of the school that whole day, ever since those five – plus the ten with relatives in Were – had been taken out. Andrew and the others had become ... something of a puzzle to the other rich, well-off students who, in their ignorance, would have never dreamt some of their number could have come from the poorest all-Magical district in Britain. Many of them had been re-evaluating their impressions of the five, Slytherin taking it the hardest as not one, but two of the five that had become known as "The Were Children," bore the colours of their

own House; Blaise Zabini and Henry Darris, sixth and second years respectively.

Many of Slytherin were unsure of how to treat two of their own number, who had on many accounts been a part of conversations dismissing or outright mocking the life led by those from suburbs such as Were. Had the two – both of whom had lost living relatives in the space of merely a few hours – been from any other House, they would have wasted no time in teasing names, cutting remarks and snide sneers in the corridors. But, for the very first time, Slytherin was in a dilemma of the very persons they despised being one of their own.

To say they were ... confused, would have been a gross understatement.

"Where are they now? Are they okay?" Neil's eyes darkened suddenly. "They – they weren't ... y'know, tortu–"

"No, Neil, they're fine," Andrew's voice was pure bliss – a stark contrast to the depression that had seeped into many of the fourteen other students who had been called to the antechamber. "Just ... just a little tense, that's all. They're in the guest apartments on the Third Floor at the moment, but Ha–"

"Hey, Neil!" a voice with far more than the hint of an Irish accent Neil had approached where the two Ravenclaws were sitting, their quiet conversation abruptly halted as they turned to face the approaching Gryffindor. He had a remarkable likening to Neil, although his hair was darker and less curled, and his skin a little more tanned – Neil preferred to spend his time indoors, reading, rather than outside roughhousing as Seamus Finnigan did.

"Hi, Seamus," Neil extended the welcome cautiously; knowing how his brother, the heir to their mother's magical and still powerful bloodline, could get around Andrew. Seamus had been more than disappointed when he discovered the "type" Neil's first Hogwarts friend was. "What're you doing here?"

"I just wanted to see if your friend was alright, after everything that happened," Seamus turned an unusually polite eye to Andrew, who bristled slightly – he would have much more preferred the blatant disregard Neil's brother usually held for him, rather than this ... fake

concern he was portraying for reasons Andrew could easily guess at.
"It's ... Anthony, right?"

"Andrew," the Potter corrected in a smaller voice than he'd used all day. Nothing drew him back into his shell faster than Seamus, not even Snape during one of his fouler moods in Potions. "My name's Andrew."

"Andrew, right," Seamus agreed, his mouth slipping briefly into a smirk before he forced it into a painful-looking smile. "So, Andrew, are you ... alright? I mean, your family wasn't hurt or anything, were they?"

As I thought, Andrew gritted his teeth mentally – no where near courageous enough to do so in real life. He's just here fishing for answers to report back to his friends – yep, I can see them from here, he didn't even need to strain his neck to see Seamus' fellow sixth-year Gryffindors staring at them with no sense of subtlety from the table farthest to the right. Idiots.

"My family is fine," Andrew turned back to Seamus – intending to glare at him, but the motions somehow getting mixed up between his mind and his eyes, resulting in a weak flicker towards the tall teenager before he flushed and ducked his head. "They're just resting now."

"Ah – so they're ... staying with relatives, or something?"

"No, they-"

"It's really none of your business, Sea'," Neil bluntly informed his older brother – sometimes bare truth the only way to get through to those block-head Gryffindors. A universal fact accepted among almost all of the three other Hogwarts Houses.

"Woah, easy Neil, I was just askin'," Seamus held up his hands in a 'calm down' motion, his eyes turning briefly to his younger brother. Andrew sagged visibly in relief as the piercing eyes left him, and he looked down at his laden plate, suddenly unable to eat – no where near as hungry as he had been. "No harm came from being curious, y'know-"

"I think you should go back to your table, Seamus. You're not wanted here." Andrew hadn't heard Neil's voice so cold; for the first time, he was presented with the face of a wealthy child from a once-pureblooded family, rather than the First Year student he'd become acquainted with over the weeks.

"Neil, you know I didn't mean it like-"

"Go, or I swear to Merlin I'll be owling Mum t'morrow about your boyfriend over there, Dean was i-"

Seamus' face paled so swiftly Andrew automatically flinched forward, half expecting the teenager to faint onto the hard stone floor.

"You wouldn't."

"I would, now get out of here!" Neil's voice never rose above a deadly whisper; Seamus left as if the hounds of hell were on his heels, Andrew watching him go with a puzzled look on his face before turning back to his friend.

"Neil, what-?"

"Mother has always been a ... traditionalist, she was the only child of a wealthy pureblooded family," Neil explained quietly as he eyed his dinner plate in distaste. "The idea that her eldest son, her magical heir, was gay – therefore unable to pass our blood, magic and legacy to the next generation – would tear her apart."

Andrew blinked.

"Sea – Seamus is-"

"Yes, but please, don't tell anyone you know, especially my mother – Merlin forbid you ever meet her," Neil added in a half-silent whisper.

Andrew nodded, poking his untouched plate then laying the utensil down gingerly.

"About that ... would you like to come meet my family, after dinner?"

Neil looked across at him.

"I don't think there's much left of dinner anyway – can we go now?"

Poppy sighed as she sat at the bedside of the comatose Potter heir, her fingers gently pressed into the slim, pale wrist. Spells might have shown her his heartbeat in an instant, but sometimes the situation called for a more direct approach. It was what she'd been trained for, after all.

"How is he?"

Poppy let the wrist slip gently from her grasp, her eyes still examining the unmoving features of the still teen.

"Stable, to say the least," the Healer couldn't look at the two hopeful parents standing behind her – Jonas and Sarah sitting behind them at a desk in the single room, Jonas' master and Poppy's cousin Louise standing behind them. The strong woman had made a quick recovery, waking only hours after arriving at the tents, just in time to leave with the Potters and four other survivors for Hogwarts. The curse cast on her blood – thinning it to the point where she barely had enough oxygen to move, let alone function – had been dealt with swiftly and easily. "He ... isn't in any danger of falling into a deeper coma, but there's been no increase in brain activity either. I suggest letting him rest, and emerge from this sleep naturally. Time always heals." Poppy gave the boy's hand one last pat before standing gracefully, finally facing the disappointed, but understanding family.

"Thank you for all this, Madame Pomfrey," Lily smiled at the elder woman as she leant into James' arm wrapped lovingly around her shoulders. "It means the world to me. If – if there's anything I could do–"

"Nothing, Lily dear," Poppy assured the woman, smoothing down her robes. "I couldn't ask payment for this."

"But–"

"Not a word, Mrs. Potter," Poppy gave the woman her best Healer's-glare. "Not one single word."

James smiled and leant into Lily's ear, sharing a stage-whisper,

"I think we should do what she says, Lil'. Healer knows best, hm?"

Lily laughed gently and shook her head in bewilderment.

"There's a similar saying in the muggle wor-"

"Mum! Dad, where are you?"

Lily turned for the door, twisting from James' half-embrace as she did.

"That's Andrew's voice. Andrew!" Lily's voice rose as she moved to open the dark wooden door that led to the larger room all survivors living currently in Hogwarts shared, a common room of sorts. "Andrew, what're you doing here, sweetie, I thought you were in the Great Hall getting dinner?"

As she emerged into the room, her eyes were immediately drawn to the two newest occupants of the otherwise empty room – the four other inhabitants having shut themselves in their rooms with their children, sisters or brothers to nurse their wounds and recover in silence. She paused when she saw the obviously-wealthy looks of the taller of the two boys, but smiled anyway and moved forward while Sarah emerged from Harry's room, the others remaining behind to talk quietly.

"Hey, Mum!" Andrew smiled gently at his mother and sister, stepping forward and motioning weakly to the curly-haired boy beside him. "This is Neil, I told you about him in one of the letters I sent home–"

"Yes, of course, welcome Neil! I'm Lily Potter, Andrew's mother, but please feel free to call me Lily," the woman nodded gently to the boy, who looked up at her with a serious and slightly hesitant expression.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, ma'am," Neil dipped his head in a brief mockery of a bow. "Andrew's told me a lot about you."

"Has he, now?" Lily looked teasingly down on her youngest son, who flushed and stumbled his way around the question.

"Um, yeah, hey, erm – Mum ... how's – how's Harry?"

"The same," Lily's face fell ever-so-slightly. "Madame Pomfrey ... isn't sure when he'll wake up, and stands by her previous estimation of ... after the next week or so."

Andrew's hear skipped a beat, he barely noticed when Sarah came to stand beside their mother.

"A week! But – Mum, Harry–"

"Harry, is going to be fine," Lily pressed in the gentlest voice she could muster. "For now, how about we show you and your friend around? Even if you won't be living in these rooms, it will still do you some good to know where everything is when you come to visit, hm?"

Andrew lowered his head and nodded, his eyes dulling briefly before he pushed the lingering pain of Harry's condition away and focusing instead on the here and now – Neil, and his family.

"Sure, Mum. So, um, Neil, this is my sister Sarah – I ... don't think you two will get along–"

"Hey!"

"Andrew, manners! I never thought I'd have to say something like this to you, you're usually so soft spoken–"

"B-but it's the truth, Mum! They're complete opposites, please make sure you never leave them alone together, I don't know what could happen–"

"Andy, I swear to Merlin if you don't shut up I'm telling him about the incident where Jennifer accidentally charmed that quill to–"

"Wha- Sarah, no! You swore you'd never tell anyone tha–"

"Oh, I remember that! Your face was red for days–"

"Jonas, honey, when did you get–"

"Jona' no! You can't tell him–"

"Why ever not, it sounds ... interesting, to say the least."

"Neil!"

And that was how Neil Finnegan was introduced to the Potter family.

Or at least ... most of them.

"This is ... your oldest brother?"

"Yeah. This is – this is Harry," Andrew swallowed the sudden lump in his throat, stepping forward through the heavy, awkward silence to take the limp hand resting on the cover. There was only he and Neil in the five-by-six metre room, furnished by a chest of empty drawers in dark wood, a soft double-bed – without hangings – in cream covers, a wide window over a two-seater couch in matching colours and a light brown rug, circular that dipped just below Harry's bed in the far corner from the door. What they had saved of Harry's possessions was stacked in cardboard boxes on a wooden corner desk ... waiting for the day Harry woke to sort them away himself.

"What's wrong with him?" Neil hesitated to ask his friend, who he noticed tense – refusing to answer.

"I see you've met Harry. He just turned sixteen this July," James stepped into the room and told the newcomer, smiling sadly down at his first son's face. "He took his OWLs this school year just gone."

Neil blinked, his mind whirring through the fact quickly.

"He was home-schooled?"

"Is," Andrew said softly. "He is home-schooled."

Neil backtracked faster than you could say Merlin.

"Sorry, sorry Andrew – I – he is home-schooled?"

"Yes, since he was eleven," James leant against the chest of drawers absently as he watched Andrew hold Harry's fingers gingerly. "That's when First School in We—" he stopped sharply, took a shallow breath as pain glanced through his mind, before continuing, "-in Were finished, we don- didn't have any formal education after that. And with ... Hogwarts fees being so high, and

the only magical school in all of Britain ..." he trailed off – leaving Neil to interpret his words as he would.

"James? James, love, are you in here?" Lily's voice rose softly as she called through the half-open door, pushing it back as she stepped through. "I've looked through the boxes, and I only found half of Sarah's course books – two of Harry's are missing, although the last few chapters of Advanced Runes and Practical Applications was torn out, we'll need to see about getting them replaced. When you have time, could you add them to the claims we'll be submitting to—" her eyes fell on Neil, who was watching the one-sided conversation awkwardly. "Oh, Neil – I wasn't aware you were still in here, isn't it nearly curfew?"

"Curfew isn't 'till ten, Ma'am."

"And it's just gone half nine now, you'd better run along quickly before McGonagall catches you—"

"But, Ravenclaw Tower's just five minutes walk—" Andrew caught Neil's eye and shook his head briefly. "-oh, but, erm – of course, better to be safe than sorry!" Neil smiled hesitantly. "Come on, Andrew – I've marked down all the reading we were given today in Charms, and we were supposed to practice turning wooden cubes to metal ones for Transfiguration. Even though Professor McGonagall did say you would be exempt from homework, I knew you'd still want to do at least some of it to make sure—"

Andrew waved shortly to his parents as they left Harry's room, passing by Sarah and Jonas as they crossed the large sitting room and nodded goodbye.

"We'll see you in tomorrow, Andy," Sarah smiled as they shouldered open the tall wooden doors separating the guest apartments from the rest of the castle. "Dumbledore said he'd be introducing us to the rest of the school, but we'll be eating in here, so you'll have to come visit us after classes, oka—"

"Sure, Sarah. 'Night!"

"Later, Andy."

"'Night, Jonas."

The door closed behind them heavily, the sound of the metal catch sliding home loud in the otherwise silent room.

Sarah turned to Jonas, who was staring at the door unseeingly.

"He's changed."

He didn't acknowledge her softly spoken sentence with anything more than a slightly droop in the arc of his shoulders, a barely-there sigh escaping his lips.

Minutes passed.

"Yeah ... yeah. He has."

Poppy visited the Potter family twice a day, once in the morning alongside Louise, who came to pick up her apprentice at ten for whatever lesson she had in mind, and once again the evening after dinner to check up on her newest favourite patient. During these meetings, she came to know the Potter children better than even the most accident prone student to grace her Hospital Wing, came to become close friends with James and Lily, and – despite having had not a single conversation with the teen in question – felt like she already knew Harry Potter better than he knew himself.

Somewhere in the third day the Potters had spent in the apartments of Hogwarts, she started sifting through Harry Potter's greatly diminished belongings, sorting them away absently as she observed the charts and glowing graphs hanging above the unconscious boy's bed. She hummed as she folded the few salvaged clothes away, sighed sadly when she arranged a small handful of framed pictures on the bedside table – and finally paused when she came to the collection of books and school-related paraphernalia James and Lily had saved. Admittedly, the thin layer of soot and memories would never fade, but they were functional, and the family had long learnt not to complain over the state of second-hand books or clothes.

Accidental Magic; How To Recognize And Treat It, The Inner Studies Of Magical Core, Psychological Tricks For The Magically Unsure, Occlumency – The Forgotten Art, From Magical Core To Magical Energy; How To Accelerate Your Learning Experience! and, Advanced Metaphysical Magical Theories. Poppy's eyes widened

against her will as they fell on the small stack of six books – one of them sporting a hideously bent spine – that looked to be apart from the others. All of them related to ...

"Oh, Harry," Poppy spoke to the sleeping boy gently. "You're looking for a cure, aren't you?" She gently stroked one lock of creeping hair, lowering her eyes thoughtfully.

Picking up the topmost books – the book on Accidental Magic, which was well-thumbed with many notes and bookmarks scattered throughout – she flicked through it thoughtfully, and found out particular page that seemed more well-read than the others.

Independent studies in 1890's and 1950's have proven Accidental Magic occurs in a fashion directly proportional to the comparative percentage of Magical Core that has been unlocked in both subconscious and conscious mind, and increases in both frequency and intensity when the magical user has potent or large quantities of magic available. In the case of an underpowered magical user ex. Squib, Accidental Magic will be infrequent or nonexistent. Similarly, overpowered magical users will find their subconscious to be extremely sensitive to the channels of magic, and will perform at the slightest provocation.

Poppy sighed as she gently closed the paperback book and gently replaced it on the top of the small pile. Her eyes drifted to the sleeping teen, and she lowered her head sadly as she thought of how many times he must have read that single paragraph, and despaired.

Having read through Healer Felix's notes already, she knew exactly what measures awaited the boy should he ever lose control completely, or succumb to his emotions fully.

Biting her lower lip in an usual display of worry in the usually cool, distant nurse, Poppy turned her heel and left the room silently.

The least she could do ... was help.

Sarah was sprawled over one of the many soft, plush couches that decorated the shared sitting room in the guest apartments. The lounges and sitting chairs were arranged to define and surround three distinct areas, the thick cushions a smooth velvety cream and

incredibly comfortable. The area she sat in now surrounded a large, low-lying coffee-table on which her course work for the day had been spread. A few leafy plant decorations were dotted throughout the wide room, them and the singular fireplace set in clay-coloured stone the only colour in the otherwise cream, brown and white decorated room. A kitchenette and long dining table was along a far wall, with a small call-fire where meals could be ordered from the House Elves in the kitchens. The walls were fashioned from pale rock and hung with brief, simple drapes or sculptures. There was not a single window in the entire room.

Perhaps the strangest thing of the new arrangement, Sarah mused, wasn't having a room to herself – she'd grown used to that in Andrew's absence – but rather not having the entire apartment to herself. She had become so used to emerging from her room late in the mornings to find her mother and father already gone for work, Jonas off somewhere with Louise and Harry studying alone in his room; now, however, she found herself constantly dealing with the scraping of quills at a desk her father had claimed, the sounds of Lily flipping through books or newspapers, the footsteps and hushed conversations of the four other occupants they had met briefly.

Kevin Henguild, Daniel Mustar's twenty year old cousin, rarely left his spacious, yet bland room on account of the pain-ridden torture he had undergone by the hand of the Dark Lord himself; the only reason he had forgone Daniel's parents' offer of sanctuary was the Healer, Poppy Pomfrey, just down the hall. The eighteen year old sister of Sally-Anne Perks, Jannen Perks, had been given a room atop a honey-coloured staircase; after loosing both mother and father in the attack, she spent little time doing anything other than comforting her fifteen year old sister and watching the hypnotizing fire whenever classes were taking place.

The last of the two other tenants were the father and eight-year-old brother of Slytherin's seventh-year Miles Bletchley, who'd been keeper for Slytherin Quidditch team since his second year, and had lost only his thin mother in the raid. The pair were given a set of small connected rooms, yet often frequented the sitting room, reading or playing exploding snap while they waited for Mr Bletchley's files to be returned from Gringotts along with the requested withdrawal. It wouldn't be enough for a down payment on rent, but Mr Bletchley was looking in Hogsmeade for a job already, and the depleted family had entered the apartments with literally

nothing but the clothes on their back and the wand tucked into the father's jeans pocket.

The Potters' own rooms branched separately off a short corridor on the far side of the sitting rooms, Lily and James with a master suite, Sarah opposite them, Jonas beside her, and Harry having been given the room and connected en-suite furthest from the open-arch entrance, right at the end.

The nine survivors who had taken this refuge rarely spoke; Harry and Kevin's reasons being understandable, both of them bedridden as they were, and barely five words had been spoken by the youngest of the nine since his arrival in the spacious rooms. The shared apartment may have been a safe haven for them all, but the walls and floors were tinged with the taste of regret and loss as they all reflected on what they had experienced and witnessed.

Sarah, now, felt the full weight of that loss as she glanced over at little Tony Bletchley. Eight years old, with adorable hazel eyes; he had been held under a crimson Cruciatus, one minute for every year he had walked the earth. His father and brother had hovered over him constantly after arrival; his nightmares often woke the other tenants in the early hours of the morning from their own night terrors.

Twirling the chipped mechanical pencil in her hand, Sarah ran her eyes over a half-read sentence, and gave up.

There was so little to do in the rooms they had been given; her thoughts couldn't help but wander to the memories of that night, the fear that held her every time she tried to leave the warded, secure rooms, the way her heart stuttered whenever one of them left the spelled doors open and the sounds of the school, of hundreds of voices and footsteps and shouts, was given entry.

Jonas, she'd noticed, had no trouble leaving the warded and protected rooms, venturing out to the world-renowned greenhouses, or even into the Forbidden Forest the Headmaster had mentioned to them on one of their first days there. Mum and Dad had taken a few walks around the campus, stargazing from the tallest Astronomy Tower, watching the small, passive waves break of the shores of the Great Lake.

But she, no, even after five days in this – this perfect place, such a beautiful landscape she could see from her room's window ... even after five entire days, she still had yet to step even one foot outside the suddenly absolute boundaries the thick apartment walls provided.

Back home, there had never really been such boundaries. Home wasn't just the apartment; home was everywhere, she lived in her house as much as lived on the twisting, thin streets, as much as she lived in the courtyards and archways. There had never really been a 'home' for her; everywhere was home.

To lose all that, for 'home' to have diminished from everything, to nothing ...

She wasn't sure why she was so scared to leave this new haven, she wasn't sure why she was so scared to expand the new safe area she'd been presented with.

Maybe it was the students; so many new faces, hundreds of them, and among them perhaps three she could recall from half-remembered memories of her younger years. To be presented with so many unfamiliar people, when her whole life she'd grown around the same people, the same personalities, the same rules and circumstances ...

Or perhaps it was the hallways? To be encased completely in stone was not an unfamiliar feeling to her; the walls and alleys of Were often stretched so high and pressed so tight that, despite the thin rain that drizzled down or the wind that whistled thinly in your ears, you felt as if you were indoors rather than out. But these halls and walkways were far more open, far more luxurious and ... somehow, just not right.

Or perhaps it was the fear that, despite what her mother, what James, what Dumbledore had promised time and time and time again – claiming that Hogwarts was the safest place, that there was no other compound with wards this complex, that there was no where else in the entire world where she could be less in danger – despite this ... she couldn't help but feel that she had never, never been closer to death than she was here.

And when she considered that Were had felt safe, in light of all that had happened ... that was truly a very, very frightening thought indeed.

Commentary: Hogwarts Students

I will be mentioning this issue in passing later, however I feel the need to explain it in more depth here as well. Now, it is common knowledge that in canon!Harry's Hogwarts – where all children go to Hogwarts regardless of social or monetary status – there was an average of five boys and five girls in each House for the 1991 Sorting. Meaning an average of 40 students in each year, if this number is taken to be the norm across all years. Meaning there would be, at any one time, 280 students in Hogwarts.

Now, if we are to believe that Wizards live to, approximately, 150 years of age, this means there are 6,000 witches or wizards in Britain at most (remembering that some die prematurely.) Currently, Britain has an estimated population of over 62 million. Therefore, magical persons fill about 0.00009 percent of this population. This percentage, with a world population of almost seven billion, means that there are about 630,000 witches and wizards spread over the entire world at any one time – at a stretch. And that includes Muggleborns, who may in fact leave the magical world altogether after graduation. Compare this to the muggle population of nearly 7,000,000,000.

And, excuse me for saying this, but that seems just a little unrealistic.

So, instead, I will be going by an assumption discussed by myself and my friends in depth during one of our nerdier gatherings. That the reason there are only 40 students in Harry Potter's year group is – and I believe many of us forget this – because they were in the middle of a war when they were born. People are less likely to have children in war because they are afraid they will die. And many of these children will have died, thus decreasing their numbers even further. So, by this assumption, we can guess that when the war ends, couples in Magical Britain will celebrate by, among other things, doing what they were too scared to do during the war. AKA: Procreate.

Following this line of thought, I would expect the population of newborns in Magical Britain to increase dramatically in, say, 1982 or 1983, nine months or more after the defeat of Voldemort in '81. Therefore, the Sorting in Hogwarts of '93 and after will have a noticeably larger number of students than any of the years previously, a trait following through to the years after. So, in this fanfiction, while Harry's equivalent year – Sixth Year – and above will have no more than forty students at best, I have decided that Fourth Year and below will all have numbers averaging at least 80, if not more, and will take this to be the normal number of children born to the British Magical Community each year.

Taking these new statistics, the magical population of the world has now doubled.

In this fanfiction, of course, there will also be those children who do not go to Hogwarts. In Were First School, which has about forty students per year, on average two would be destined for Hogwarts.

And that opens up a whole new can o' beans.

In this world, by my own calculations (taking into account Were First School not being the only children's school in all of Britain, obviously), the population of Wizarding Britain is over 25,000. Four thousand living in Were (third largest settlement in Britain), the rest in singular households or smaller communities strewn throughout the Muggle world.

And wasn't that the mother of all Commentaries?

(I can just tell I'm going to get a load of shit over this one.)

Chapter Nine: Enter, The Golden Trio

"Did you hear?"

"What?"

"Did you know-"

"No way! Really?"

"Merlin, d'you think it's true?"

"Is he really real?"

"I wonder what he looks like-"

"I wonder what he dresses like-"

"I hope they don't try to talk to me-"

"Father would get sooo pissed if-"

Amid the rush of whispers and gossip and all things that truly mattered in the world of Hogwarts, a trio of teenaged students entered through the gleaming archway to the Great Hall, dressed in immaculately-cut robes with gold-and-red shields adorning their ties and lapels. The tallest was a gangly-looking red head, with a scattering of freckles, his shirt hanging out and a little fray around the edges of his sleeves. To his right, his friend – who looked just a touch over-fed – was walking carefully, his brushed black hair hiding the jagged ends of a flame-red scar that cut into his forehead, impervious to any and all glamour charms, and the reason this boy's name was known all over the globe. The final member of the trio was a young woman with tightly-curled brown hair and a satchel over one shoulder bearing no less than four thick books at any one time, the straps charmed to withstand the strain and weight.

The trio, this trio, the Golden Trio, was the group to know in the busy school of Hogwarts.

Ronald Weasley; the sixth son of the Head of a Ministry Department, notoriously one of the poorer Pureblooded families, but with more than enough distinction to their name, and a status of some of the

purest blood around these days. Not to mention Keeper for his House Quidditch Team since fifth year, and as of this year Captain as well.

Hermione Granger; top in her class in every subject, despite her muggle parents. At the recent age of seventeen, Hermione already had connections in surprisingly high places, on account of her determination and passion for whatever pet project she took upon herself. Being on first-name terms with almost all of faculty didn't hurt, either.

And Neville Longbottom; the Boy-Who-Lived, the Chosen One, the Saviour; everyone wanted to know Neville Longbottom, and anyone who did was immediately granted kudos and a following of enthusiastic children who, obviously, had nothing better to do than moon over the one who had defeated Voldemort as a child.

Sitting down at the heavily-laden breakfast table, the three were quickly surrounded by their year mates, siblings and other well-wishers, voices curling around them in a slowly rising maelstrom of noise.

"Hermione, oh my gosh, did you hear?" a honey-blonde with glossed features asked in a hushed, scandalous whisper as she snuck in beside her year mate. Lavender Brown knew the secrets of the Hogwarts populace sooner than anyone, sometimes even the students involved, and was quick to share these tit-bits of gossip with anyone who would stand to listen.

"Hm?" Hermione prodded at the freshly-cooked muffin before her, frowning as she debated calories and fat content absently.

"Okay, I heard from Dean, who heard from Justin, who heard from Ginny, who heard from Romilda, who heard from Joyce, whose cousin is best friends with a boy who heard that-" Hermione blanked out the pre-gossip drivel, knowing the recitation was some sort of therapy or ritual for the blonde, "-that a first year Raven – one of the Were Children, y'know – has three older siblings who never went to Hogwarts and that they are in the Castle right now!"

Hermione glanced to Lavender, pushing down her knife and fork while, across the table, Neville and Ron were discussing a Death

Eater attack on a small Muggle town in Ireland. Four hundred dead, two of them wizards. The first attack since the devastation of Were.

"Well, of course," Hermione smiled to Lavender politely. "I think I've seen one of them around, looks to be about – third year, black hair, his facial structure has a strong resemblance to Potter. I heard he had an Apprenticeship with Pomfrey's cousin."

Lavender gasped in an unnecessarily dramatic fashion.

"No! How did – someone from there get an Apprenticeship?"

Hermione wiped her lips on a white linen napkin gently.

"Well, Were was one of the largest Wizarding communities in Britain, it stands to reason that there's a high chance of a Master and Apprentice meeting there, far more of a chance than in Hogwarts, despite the relatively large proportion of Masters to potential Apprentices," Hermione rattled off a quick, precise tones. "I, personally, would be thrilled at the chance of an Apprenticeship, especially in a field such as Potions or Healing, it's a shame Professor Snape refuses to take anyone on–"

"Yeah, anyway – so, Pavarti and I heard there was an older brother, our age – he would've been in our year if he'd attended. Apparently Terry from Raven looked it up, and there's about three or four names crossed off for our year who should've attended. Sally-Anne, got sick and ended up a year below us, two others who were killed by You-Know-Who before Neville offed him, and a bloke who's name is Harry Potter," Lavender bobbed her head a little in emphasis, staring up at Hermione expectantly.

"Who's this?" Ron frowned, looking over the table at the two girls talking in hushed, important tones. "I heard 'Potter'. Like the kid from Were?"

"Harry Potter, older brother of Andrew Potter, a first year Ravenclaw. He was supposed to be in our year, but got pulled for some reason – his name was crossed off the attendance rolls in the Library," Hermione explained quickly, Lavender leaning forward eagerly to see what the three would make of it.

"He hasn't left him rooms once since they arrived here, so no one knows that much about him," Lavender supplied with a curve of her pink, shiny lips.

"Why d'you suppose he was pulled?" Ron frowned as he spoke, chewing a crust of jam toast thoughtfully.

"Probably 'cause they didn't have the money, they did come from Were you know," Neville spoke quietly, but Hermione quickly shook her head.

"No, if they could afford to send Andrew, they could afford to send their eldest," she spoke matter-of-factly as she dug through her bag for a parchment and quill. "The only reason I can think that they didn't want to send him here is they needed him at home. It couldn't be for work – like I said, if they could afford to send Andrew here, they clearly weren't pressed for money – so it must have been for studies."

"But – Hogwarts offers the best education in all of Europe!" Ron protested strongly, digging his fork into his plate aggressively. "What could he possibly learn in Were, that he couldn't learn here?"

Neville paled, just a little, and glanced up in time to share a meaningful look with Hermione.

They spoke as one, Lavender listening hungrily all the while.

And in the wonderful fashion of misinformed teenagers, came to the most exact wrong impression that they could.

"Dark Magic."

"Alright, I've gathered all the newspaper articles I could find about the Potter family, as well as any official Ministry records Hogwarts has on hand," Hermione announced as she emerged from the long aisle where past newspapers were curled and stored in racks much like wine bottles, as references for research projects. Neville and Ron sat at one of the nearby tables, lit by two luminescent oil lamps, as they waited patiently for their studious friend to return.

"There's not much, is there?" Ron cast his eye over the small pile of papers and a single hardcover book.

"No, apparently the Potter family left the spotlight of Diagon and the Pureblood Social Events over a decade ago," Hermione hummed as she opened the first article and scanned her eyes over it. Tutting, she threw it into a new pile and pulled the next one closer.

It took only five short minutes before Neville drew in a panicked gasp and stared at the page before him and paling quickly.

"What?" Hermione rushed over, pushing on Neville's shoulder so she could read unobstructed. "What is- oh, my God."

Ignoring Ron and Neville's confused expression at the Muggle term, Hermione drew the book closer and scanned the text swiftly.

"What is it?" Ron asked loudly, looking to Neville's drawn face. "Was their Dad a Death Eater or something?"

"No," Hermione shook her head, her low pony-tail swinging against her shoulders. "No, it's – it's horrible."

"What? 'Mione."

"Lily Potter, the mother, used to work as an Unspeakable for the Ministry," Hermione started, her voice lowered so the Librarian and other students wouldn't overhear them. Rain pattered softly against the dark windows; it was nearing curfew, and a light rain storm had taken hold of the castle just a few hours earlier. "But when the eldest Potter was about two years old, his magical core was tampered with by some very, very delicate instruments and equipment in the Department of Mysteries. The information is absolutely classified, but the missing equipment was rumored to be worth almost a million pounds, practically bankrupting the Potter Family when the Ministry demanded compensation. That's something like two-hundred thousand galleons, by the way," Hermione didn't even need to look up to see the confused look on the two pure-bloods' faces.

"Disgraced, they were cast out from the Ministry, and took up residence in Were, the only place they could find employment after being black-listed by the Ministry." Hermione finished with a thoughtful look on her face, a look that turned to suspicion when she saw there was nothing else on the matter in all of the articles she

had gathered. "Why would they try to keep something like that quiet?" she asked almost half an hour later.

"You don't think ... maybe Mrs Potter had done it on purpose?" Ron whispered urgently, leaning forward so the others would hear him clearer. "Maybe she was experimenting on her son using Ministry top-secret stuff, they found out, and fired her?"

"Ronald, if something like that had happened, she would have been sent to Azkaban for it!" Hermione replied in quiet, yet hard tones.

"Not necessarily, not if they bribed their way out of it," Ron pressed, warming to the idea eagerly. "I mean, really, how do you wreck two-hundred thousand galleons worth of stuff? I bet most of it was a bribe from Lord Potter to get his wife out of there, they hid in Were so the Ministry wouldn't find them—"

"But that would mean Lily Potter was experimenting on her own son! What kind of woman does that?" Neville interjected weakly, still looking a little clammy.

"You'd be surprised," Ron said darkly, "Some of the pureblooded witches can get very twisted. Mrs Potter was a muggleborn, who knows what she was thinking?"

The glare Hermione sent his was muted with thoughtful ideas engulfing her mind.

"It doesn't matter, does it?" Neville shook his head, as if in disappointment. "What matters is that there must be something wrong with him. That boy – Harry – he hasn't left the Apartments at all for the five days since he and his family got here. The only information we have on him is that he's our age, didn't go to Hogwarts despite his parents having the money to send his brother, lived in one of the magically diverse communities of Wizarding Britain, and probably has a screwed up head or body or something from the experiments that happened to him when he was a kid. The article in the Prophet yesterday said the Potters' house was one of the only ones left even partially standing, and obviously none of them were killed."

"I know I may be wrong but ... there's only one thing that comes to mind, here."

His chocolate brown eyes lowered to the one dated picture they had found of the elusive teen, an identification picture for the school he had previously attended. All three of them had cringed at that ... deadened look in the boys eyes, an absolute lack of everything that completely unnerved them.

Neville's voice fell to a horrible whisper as the three of them sat at the small, round table and darkness crept in all around them.

"Guys ... I think Harry Potter might be a Death Eater."

Hermione walked smartly down the busy stone corridor, Neville and Ron standing on either side as they hurried to their next class.

And, as had been the case ever since the night before when they had made that most horrible discovery, their topic of discussion was none other than the mysterious, dangerous teenager who should have, by all rights, been their year mate.

"In any case, the thing we need most is evidence," Hermione spoke to the others quietly, monitoring her voice so the students rushing past in either direction couldn't quite catch what they were saying. "Dumbledore won't believe us if we just rushed into his office. What we need is good, hard proof."

"I still can't believe that Dumbledore let a Dea—" Hermione shushed Ron quickly, who flushed and continued even quieter, "-one of them into the castle."

"Shouldn't the wards have stopped him?" Neville frowned. "I thought they were spelled to prevent something like this from happening."

"Then he probably Floo'd in, it's the only way of circumventing it." When Ron only looked confused, Hermione sighed and repeated, "It's the only way of getting around it."

"Ooh," Ron drew the vowel out, expressing his understanding in the usual mono-sibyllic manner.

Neville readjusted the weight of his bag and shuffled a little faster.

"Snape is going to kill us," he moaned quietly as he glanced to his wrist watch. Hermione mimicked the younger boy, and paled despite herself.

The three hurried on, quickly rounding off their conversation as the entrance to the Dungeons came into view.

"We need to find a way into the Apartments, we'll sneak in tonight with that map Fred and George gave you, we'll need to check his—" Hermione paused and waited for a Hufflepuff to turn the corner before hissing, just before they reached a Potions classroom, "-check his arm."

"Agreed," Neville and Ron breathed as one, before the two dark-headed teens slipped into Snape's classroom, leaving Ron to wave after them as he headed down to the much more popular and far less demanding 'Potions Intermediate,' taught by a balding, aging Slughorn who also handled most of the OWL classes.

Aside from his mother's reaction to be report card, he was thankful every Monday for his hard earned 'Acceptable' in OWLs level Potions.

That night, half an hour before the curfew imposed on him by his over-bearing parents, Jonas walked sluggishly through the tall, open doors to the Apartments, carrying in his arms a small mountain of books Louise had "encouraged" him to borrow from the Library Dumbledore had permitted them to access if they so wished. Sarah had, somehow, managed to convince him to look up a couple of rare volumes on Runes and, for some reason, Egyptian Hieroglyphics, during his trip to pick up two – two – books on Herbology.

Which was why he was now staggering under the weight of almost ten.

Pausing as he kicked his foot back awkwardly, trying to close the huge, heavy doors with both hands full, Jonas finally gave in to the impossible task and lugged the heavy tomes to Sarah's room, where he could rid himself of over half of them. The door was charmed to close itself automatically, anyway.

So, walking away from the wooden oak, he forgot all about it. Leaving the doors to the Apartments ajar, ever so slightly.

No one noticed when a dense wooden block wedged itself in the open crack, propping them open and creaking slightly when the charm set in, but was unable to complete the task set to it.

Crouching in an alcove not five metres away, Hermione grinned triumphantly, her wand pointed unwaveringly at the cube, while Ron and Neville crouched behind her, eyes fixed to a tattered parchment map.

"Now ... we wait."

Three hours after curfew. One o'clock in the Merlin-damned morning. And finally, finally, the last footsteps of the elusive visitors had calmed and stilled as they retreated to their beds and retired for the night.

"Finally," Ron breathed, straightening with Neville as Hermione crept from the alcove to the whisper-thin opening of the heavy wooden doors. The doors opened soundlessly, and the trio slipped through them without so much as a creak – silencing charms having already been cast on their feet and robes to discourage any light sleepers from waking to disrupt them.

Grasping the map in his slightly-thick fingers, Neville nodded his head silently towards a small corridor that resembled an extended alcove to the right. They were just passing through the archway into the corridor when they heard something.

They froze.

"Mum ... mum ... no, no, plea – mummy, please don't – come back – no, no-"

Hermione stiffened and hissed quickly to the others,

"That's a child's voice!"

Ron's face darkened as the quiet, stifled sobs continued shortly, the three not daring to move a muscle until they'd calmed at the urging of an older male's soothing voice.

"I bet he did it," he muttered, both to himself and the others. "Potter."

"C'mon," Hermione murmured, taking Ron's arm and leading the two boys to the farthest room. Without words, she glanced to Neville, who looked down at the map he held and stared at the tiny footsteps representing their suspect.

"Not moving ... asleep?" he whispered as softly as he could, in as few words as he could manage.

"Go," Ron turned the door-handle gently, sighing in relief when it opened soundlessly.

Having already been briefed on where to search beforehand, Neville went straight to the dressers, Hermione to a lightly-laden desk she spotted in one corner, while Ron crept over to the dark-haired boy's bed and stared down at the still, unmoving form impassively.

Death Eater ... I don't know how you got past Dumbledore, but I swear, I won't let you hurt anyone in this castle ... not Ginny, not Mione ... no one.

He reached for the sleeping boy's left arm, resting above the covers ... turning the thin, pale limb in his fingers ... pushed the loose, thin sleeve up, then-

"NO!" A scream, unlike any they'd ever heard before, ripped through the room, tearing through their hearts and pushing them back as the pale boy laying in his bed sat bolt upright, wrenching his wrist from Ron's hold and staring up at them with wide, terrified, impossibly bright eyes that burned with raw, raw emotion, fright, memory, loss, fear- "STOP, please!" The teenaged boy was crying, crying like they'd never seen anyone cry in their entire lives, crying like someone who had lost everything-

Vienna, panicked eyes flashing, flew beyond his sight to a distant, cracked tomb; Karl, his tanned skin contrasting the haunting white robes he was draped in, sank through a mirror of crystal glass skimming beneath a sheet of cool, rippling water; Zane's reaching, grasping hand loomed above him, dripping a dark liquid to his upturned head, the salty taste flowing across his tongue-

They were gone. All of them. All of them. All of them, the ones he'd laughed with, cried with, grown with, lived with, loved, hated, feared-

Frothing waves lapped at his feet, withdrawing, taking with them the faces of all the children, teachers, parents, companions, friends, even the ghostly image of a girl he'd dated briefly last year-

He couldn't escape them, these thoughts, these faces, these memories that tore into him like barbs that caught hold, and no matter how he tugged, would not release him. Something held him here, in this place that was like nothing he could describe, something that pressed on his chest with painful accuracy as it broke his heart time and time and time again. He didn't know what it was, whether it was guilt, fear, death, but maybe he didn't want to know, maybe he was destined to linger in his half-world forever, maybe this was his repentance for – for – for something he didn't know, couldn't know-

A hand of shocking white broke through the shrouding, shimmering waves of black silk that surrounded him, the faces leering and pleading at him fading away as ripples of movement washed their presence away-

The hand, frightening in its unfamiliarity, snatched at him. He backed, pressing himself against the sickening, writhing walls around him, and gasped as the freckled fingers tightened around his thin wrist.

No. No, no, no, you won't take me, you won't, I won't go, I don't want to die, I don't want to die, I don't want to – please, bring them back, I don't want to-

"NO!" Harry's throat ached from that one, single word already, as he lurched forward into a world of dim colour and sound. The hand, a hand he'd thought had belonged to Death, tightened around his clothed arm painfully before he ripped away from it. No, no, no, stop - "STOP, please!" Death Eaters. They found us, they're here, they've found us, after everything, after -

Vienna. No, no, Vienna, Karl, Zane, no-

Panicked, Harry's emotions whipped across the room without even a shred of his will, forcing the three intruders (not that Harry knew them as such) back, against the pale stone wall, then through it until they were sprawled, confused, with ringing ears, on the hard floor of

the small candle-lit corridor; Ron staring at his hand all the while, as if it were a foreign thing he'd never seen, not once, in his life before.

Gasping, the walls shimmering with light around him, Harry's eyes finally cleared of memories and he finally took note of his unfamiliar surroundings.

Where ... in the hell am I?

His heart racing furiously, deep, calming breaths forced their way through his chest as he slowly began to calm down.

He glanced around the dark room, eyes catching on a lightly-glowing clock that informed him impartially that it was nearing the third hour of the morning.

I ... what happ- oh. Crap.

Mum must've ... had to use that again. How long have I been out this time? Dammit, they must have worried themselves sick, especially after – after ...

Harry, one foot swung from the bed as he began to lift himself from the bed in search for his mother and father, stopped dead as thoughts and memories finally, finally caught up with him.

Words far darker than he would have dared to use had he been in the presence of James sprung to his tongue, but before he could release them, he flinched back suddenly as the wooden door was thrown back, and three red-faced, furious teenagers he barely recognized stormed in.

"The hell was that for, idiot!" the red-haired, lanky teen raged first, his pale blue eyes glaring darkly as his hands – familiar, to Harry, as one's he had mistaken for a Death Eater's – gestured and clenched wildly. "You could've killed us-"

"Ronald, it doesn't matter," the bushy-haired girl reprimanded her friend bluntly. "What matters is that it shouldn't've been possible in the first place. Not only was he lacking a wand, but I sincerely doubt any wizard, no matter how strong, could have the training or magical capacity to non-verbally propel three living objects of considerate mass and structural complexity through an equally complex

structure reinforced with numerous wards and safe-guards without the aide of, shall we say, influences that I doubt are seen as tasteful in pleasant company-

"English, 'Mione, please," the last and shortest of them stressed quietly. "We aren't all as smart as you, you know."

"Sorry, Neville, I was too busy explaining to this Death Eater here that Dark Magic isn't allowed in Hogwarts," 'Mione' frowned at Harry disapprovingly, her fingers clutching a well kept wand in the direction of the still-disorientated Harry's direction.

A disorientated Harry who, in all fairness, had not heard a single word of what had transpired around him.

Until a familiar voice finally broke through to him.

"Harry! Merlin, Harry, you're awake!"

"Jo ... nas?" was all he had time for, before he found himself with an arm full of dark hair and thin, slightly torn pajamas.

"Thank, Merlin, we thought you were never going to wake up – oh, oh, I have to go get Mum, she's going to be so stoked, she thought she'd killed you, and we thought you were never gonna wake up, and–"

"You already said that–"

"And we were so worried, and–"

"Oi, new guy! Get the hell away from him, he's dangerous!" the red-headed Ronald suddenly yelled, breaking from the Jonas-induced stupor and lurching forward to yank the tanned teen from his elder brother.

Harry's eyes darkened at the word 'dangerous.'

"What? What're you–"

"He's a Death Eater!" Neville hissed just loud enough for them all to hear ... just loud enough, for Harry to hear.

The bedridden teen paled faster than you could say shit.

"You, Freckles, are not helping!" Jonas cried in exasperation as he broke from Ronald's weakened fingers and running lightly to Harry's side, seating himself beside his anxious brother and gripping Harry's forearms gently, forcing their eyes to meet. "Harry ... he doesn't know you. He doesn't know, okay, he's just another idiot who doesn't understand, ignore him, 'kay? Just ... just calm down, we can sort this all out later, for now, you just need ... to calm right, right down."

Harry's eyes pierced Jonas with undivided attention, slowly settling as the monotone of his sibling's familiar voice broke through the waves of alarming fear and hate spawned from the stranger's words ... Death Eater ... he could live a lifetime without hearing those words, and it still wouldn't be long enough.

But Jonas was right. He needed to calm down ... but ...

"What are you doing? Get away from that kid, he's insane! He'll kill you where he sits, just get away from him before he throws you through the wall like he did to us, or, or tortures you like he did to all those people in-

"Get the fuck out of my brother's room."

Harry turned his widening eyes from where they had been riveted on Ronald's words, to his pale-faced brother. Absolutely gobsmacked.

"Language, Jo'," he reprimanded weakly, his mouth running solely on instinctive habit. "Or I'll tell Mum." And somehow, this repetitive, simple action managed to soothe his beating heart and buffer the fires inside him ... steadyng the trembling jug half-empty of water at his bedside table.

The three strangers, on the other hand, were staring at Jonas as if he were completely mad.

"You – you actually want to stay in here, with – with ... a Death—" the shortest, Neville, began – before he was suddenly cut off.

"Will you stop calling him that! My brother is not a Dea ... one of them, I don't know where you got such a stupid idea from, but Harry

is in a very fragile condition right now, and you being here is not helping him at all! Now, will you get the hell out?" Jonas glared at them, still not moving from his position beside Harry, but still managing (somehow) to glare down at the three older teenagers with a strange sense of authority.

Hermione shifted uneasily then leant forward so she could breathe into the two boys' ears,

"We need to tell Dumbledore."

Neville's eyes flashed in agreement, and he turned back to the Potter children with an awkward, almost apologetic face.

"We ... uh, okay. Fine. We're going now. Just ... don't tell anyone we were here, right?"

Jonas, too wrapped up in making sure his elder brother was stable and sane, nodded absently and didn't even look up as the 'Golden Trio' filed nervously out from the room, walking on tip-toes as if expecting the floor to crumble beneath them, or the walls to compress and swallow them whole.

All three breathed a sigh of relief when they finally eased out the Apartment doors and stood in the dark-lit corridors.

They turned to each other, determination flaring through them, and spoke as one in hushed voices.

"Dumbledore."

Commentary: Another Epic-Long Plus Lols

Seeing as my previous Author's Note was ... considerably larger than normal, I will try to keep this short. (Later Edit: Failure.)

Due to the increased population of Hogwarts Students (please read the previous Author's Note if you are still in the dark about this), it is unrealistic to believe that there is only one teacher for each subject. With canon!classes of about twenty (two Houses per year), every teacher would have two classes per Year, fourteen classes in total. And they only teach five days a week. Holding, say, three classes a

day, the teacher's would only have one free period a week. Even that is pushing things.

With my new population of 80 students per year, twenty students per House per year, the continued trend of 'Gryffindor and Slytherin' or 'Gryffindor and Hufflepuff' lessons would not be practical in the slightest. Therefore, I will be reducing these lessons so that they are taught as mixed classes, with twenty students per class. Not only does this mean the Houses interact more, but it also means you will not necessarily be stuck with your own housemates for every single lesson.

This also means that there will now be four classes per year per subject. Four classes across seven years means twenty-eight separate classes per teacher. Besides the fact that this would be impossible to schedule, I really pity any teacher that was told to manage that.

So, I will be adding a minimum of at least one teacher for each subject. The canon!Teachers will remain as they are – Potions Master, Transfiguration Master, akin to the Head of Department, if you will – however, I will also be adding normal Potions teachers, normal Transfiguration teachers, who will take their own share of classes. This I find to be a far more realistic model. Now, I may from time to time mention these new teachers (who will total to somewhere in the twenties or thirties) but they will not be directly instrumental in the plot, just as the additional forty students per year will not be. They are nothing more than fillers – stuffing, if you will, to make Hogwarts seem more like a 'realistic' school with realistic numbers.

Having one teacher per subject is, quite frankly, silly; take Potions Master Professor Snape, for example. He will have, single-handedly, destroyed the ambitions of all Hogwarts Students to ever follow their dreams involving Potions (see: Auror) simply because, to take Potions, you have no choice but to have him as a teacher. I believe the students of Hogwarts would be far more willing to take Potions as a subject if there was the chance that someone other than Snape would teach it.

On a completely unrelated note, my thoughts while writing this chapter were quite literally:

type type type type type – sudden realization. Scan through the pre-written chapters. Pause.

-OH MY GOD, PLOT HOLE-

And then I, somehow, ended up rewriting an entire character.

Thus concludes the story of how Jimmy Peakes, a third year Gryffindor who existed for all of thirty minutes, morphed into Morag McDougal, sixth year, Ravenclaw and above all else, female.

Chapter Eleven: Recuperate

Albus was enjoying a small packet of lemon sherbet, having been woken from his slumber by an omen Minerva would have scoffed at. Nonetheless, his premonition was proven to be true when the door to his office was edged open softly, and three sleep-deprived eyes blinked through the crack at him.

"Ah, Neville, Mr Weasley, Miss Granger," the wizened Headmaster greeted them happily, stealthily slipping the packets of lime-green, sour sugar away in the fear that one of them may actually ask to share one for a change. "What is it that brings you to my office at this most lovely hour of the ... morning?" Albus shot a disbelieving look at one of the many clocks adorning the walls, blinking a little when he realized exactly which hour it was. "Do you realize how late it is, my dear students?"

"Sir, I'm sorry but ... something happened," Neville informed the Headmaster haltingly. He and Dumbledore had had a somewhat warped parody of a Grandfather-Grandson relationship; they had known each other throughout the course of the younger's life, on account of Neville's status as the famous Boy-Who-Lived, but there had always been some barrier of formality that separated them from true familial bonding.

"Do tell, Neville, my boy," Albus leant back, motioning for the three to take the seats before him. "Let's hope I did not wake at half-two for naught."

"You see ... Headmaster, we ... 'Mione, Ron and I, we've heard about the families from Were who are staying here, and ... we thought that one of them sounded a little bit suspicious," Neville bit his lip.

Albus raised an eyebrow; whatever it was he had been expecting, it certainly wasn't this. "Go on."

"Well, we heard that the oldest brother of, um, Potter, we heard that he hadn't left his rooms since he got here and-" Albus' eyes tightened a little at this, "-and we found out that he should have come to Hogwarts, only he didn't, so we thought there must be something wrong with him since his brother came, and-" if it hadn't been for his immense intelligence and common sense, Albus feared

he might have been lost by this point, "-and we researched for information on the Potters, and found out that Harry Potter had been experimented on by his mother, and-" Albus stroked his beard, staring at the flustered boy before him in wonderment, "-and we went to check tonight, but he threw us through a wall and then his brother came in and started screaming, so we left, and we think that he might be a Death Eater!"

Neville finally finished, breathing a little heavily from the effort of finally setting the story straight. Hermione and Ron on either side nodded fiercely at his points and looked to the Headmaster with meaningful expressions, as if expecting the wizened man to leap into immediate and drastic action.

Albus leant forward slowly, easing his elbows onto the table and clasping his hands gently as he stared at the three solemnly.

A long, tense moment passed.

"To be entirely truthful, children, I don't have the slightest idea what you are trying to say here."

"Mum! Mum wake up!"

"Hnngh?" Lily groaned, turning her head from where it was tucked against James' shoulder and blinking at her second-eldest in confusion. "Jona'? Whas'wrong?"

"It's Harry! He's awa-"

"What?" Lily gasped, lurching to her feet, not even bothering to throw a gown over her nightdress, and running to the door, leaving Jonas standing over his slowly waking father in amusement.

"Harry!" Lily cried softly when she reached the half-open door to her son's room, taking in the sight of the conscious boy with tears in her eyes. "Oh, Harry," she moved forward, collapsing on the bed and drawing him into her arms, hugging him as if she'd never let him go again. "Harry, Harry, thank God you're okay ..."

"Harry!" James' voice was heard from the door, and mother and son looked up to see the dark-haired man smile as he took a seat on

Harry's other side. Jonas remained at the door, smirking when he saw Harry blush as James embraced him gently.

"Dad ... where are we?" Harry's voice was soft and a little raw from misuse, but still easily understood.

"We're in Hogwarts, son," James beamed, resting his chin on the crown of Harry's head while Lily held and stroked the teen's hand gently. "After ... well, after what happened, Albus decided he'd open the doors for the family of students to stay until they were back on their feet again."

"We're ... in Hogwarts?" Harry's eyes widened, and he glanced over to Jonas who nodded in confirmation. Harry's eyes lit up and he straightened a little, missing the tearful smile his mother gave. "For real?"

"Of course, young man," an unfamiliar voice broke through Harry's thoughts, and he flinched a little when he looked up to see two tall forms, one male and one female, before him. The old, wizened man with a fluorescent orange sleeping robe could only be Dumbledore, the one who had spoken, but he had no idea who the modestly-dressed woman with dark, greying hair could be.

"Erm ... who-?"

"Ah, forgive me Mr Potter," Dumbledore smiled as he stepped further into the room, allowing the woman and Jonas to maneuver themselves into more comfortable positions against the dresser and desk chair respectively. "I am Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts, and this lovely lady here is our resident Healer, Madame Pomfrey. It truly is my pleasure to formally welcome you to this castle at last."

"Thank you ... sir?" Harry blinked, bemused – hardly able to believe that this was actually happening. He had expected any meeting between himself and the most powerful wizard in existence – however farfetched such an occurrence might have been – to be a little more formal than he in a bed between his mother and father, and Dumbledore in his horrifically designed night clothes.

"You are entirely welcome, Mr Potter," Dumbledore nodded. "Now, I believe you are in need of some medical attention and check-ups

from Madame Pomfrey, here? You gave your family quite a scare, from what I've heard."

"Feel free to call me Poppy, Mr Potter," Poppy informed the boy as she moved forward, taking control of the situation. "If you don't mind, seeing as your usual Healer is busy at St Mungos, I will be performing your medical check-ups and appointments for the next few months. Now, lie back and take a deep breath. This won't hurt at all."

Familiar with the procedure, Harry detangled himself from James' and Lily's hold and leant against the thick, soft pillows with a sigh; they were so much more comfortable than the beds at the clinic Felix worked in.

A few seconds later, and a soft, tingly feeling washed through his limbs and toes; above him, numbers, lines and a small circular chart glowed briefly. Poppy nodded absently, wafting the numbers away with her hand and moving to take James' place beside the prone teen. She pressed the tip of her wand against Harry's abdomen and whispered a single incantation, eyeing the glow intently.

"Good news, Mr Potter," she spoke after a few moments, starting the silent occupants in the room, "the antidote seems to have worked quicker than I anticipated, and all remnants of the sleeping drought should be dissolved or absorbed in a few days time. Now, you will feel a little fatigued and weak, as we can't prevent your body from taking in the remaining drought, and you'll be sleeping longer hours than usual for a week or two - but other than that you're on a surprisingly quick road to recovery."

Harry's parents smiled in relief, and Harry himself nodded wearily before sighing as he pressed further into the warmth of the bed.

"All that's left is a standard core check – Healer Felix advised in your file to perform one after any episode such as this – and we'll leave you to your sleep," Poppy concluded, rising and shaking out her robes as she stepped back.

Harry closed his eyes tightly and pulled the covers a little higher, anticipating the revealing spell he was more than familiar with, knowing the after effects all too well.

The beam of pure, blinding light was the last thing he saw as unconsciousness tugged at him with an unrelenting force, and he sank willingly; ignoring the gasps that chased him into oblivion.

"Good Merlin," Albus breathed, refusing to avert his eyes as he stared in amazement at the solid power than emanated from the teen. "I ... had heard rumors, yet, I never thought that they might actually be ..."

Poppy lowered her wand shakily, the light fading gently until it vanished altogether with a soft chime.

"How can ... one body hold so much ... potential?" she spoke aloud, as if to herself.

"There have always been repercussions," Lily shared quietly. "He went hungry as a child more times than he let us know, he ... has always been, and will always be, short for his age ... then, of course, the reason he's in this condition in the first place, the spill over of accidental magic ... it hasn't been easy for him."

Poppy sighed and reached forward to pull the covers a little higher, before stepping back and smiling weakly to the two worried parents.

"He'll be fine, James, Lily," she reassured them softly. "He just needs his rest, that's all."

James nodded in relief, Lily sighing and leaning her head on her taller husband's shoulder; her worry and lack of sleep finally catching up to her.

"In that case, I think I too will be returning to my bedchambers," Dumbledore announced cheerily, his sky blue eyes twinkling madly. "I must catch up on my beauty sleep, after all."

Jonas laughed from the doorway; only to cease awkwardly when he realized that he was the only one to find Dumbledore's statement amusing.

"Night, all!" Dumbledore waved over his shoulder as he walked serenely from the room, Poppy following in his wake with a short, worried glance back at the sleeping teenager.

"I think it's time we went back to bed too, hm?" James rubbed Lily's shoulder comfortingly, and she nodded shortly, allowing him to guide her towards the door.

Jonas hesitated, then stepped aside, allowing his parents to leave while remaining at Harry's side himself.

He stepped forward, eyes tracing his brother's face.

"... we were really worried, you know?" he told the elder quietly, sitting at Harry's side and slumping so his head was resting beside Harry's on the long, soft pillow. "Me, Sarah, Mum 'n Dad ... all of us." He took a deep, shaky breath, and closed his eyes briefly. "It was worse than last time ... we'd already lost everyone ... Malco, Anne, Beatrice ... all of them." His eyes watered. "We couldn't bear to lose you too ..."

Pressing his face into the pillow, Jonas finally, finally allowed his body to relax as soft, trembling sobs fell from him, soaking the fabric beneath him.

And finally, when all the sorrow, all the guilt and fear that he has suppressed in the effort to play the stoic older brother, had seeped into the soft cushion ... finally, he allowed himself to let those smothering emotions go. He wasn't the oldest any more, he wasn't alone; he didn't need to be the strongest any longer.

Jonas didn't notice when he gently slipped into the realms of purifying sleep, comforted by the slow, steady breaths of his older brother once again.

The morning was crisp and dim, as it always was this time of year in the Castle, but Sarah rose early none the less, dragging a worn day-coat over her patched pajamas as she stumbled by habit from her room. She'd just check in on Harry quickly, to make sure he was fine, before she went out for breakfast ...

She paused at the door, one hand half-raised to brush back a lock of fringe.

Is it just me ... or are there two Harry's?

It took her a moment more to process exactly what she was seeing before her.

Jonas, lying prone on the covers of their brother's bed, his head slumped beside the older's, eyes closed, breathing softly in time with Harry ... and snuggling.

A sly grin creeping over her face, Sarah loped back to her room in a shuffling tip-toe-run, grabbing her wand from the bedside, mad with glee that she'd taken the time to learn the spell that memorized scenes for later reviews – used most commonly in crime scenes, although in this case perfect for the current absence of a camera.

She was going to get so much bargaining power out of this one.

"... rry? Jona'? Wake u ..."

Harry blinked his eyes, somewhat aware of warmth radiating beside him, and stared hazily up at the image of his sister, not quite registering the significance of the situation.

"Hu-wha'?" he groaned unintelligently, pulling his free hand up to push his fringe away from his eyes. "Sarah? Wha' you doin' here?"

"I'm here to say hello, stupid! You're awake!" Sarah beamed happily, clapping her hands and twirling once. "And in good company, I see," she added with a smirk, looking pointedly at the sleeping image of Jonas at Harry's side. Harry looked down at the teen incomprehensibly for three long seconds, before spluttering, pushing himself upright and kicking the younger away with his knee, inadvertently waking the peacefully slumbering Jonas in the process.

"The hell?" Jonas shouted as he was suddenly and rudely expelled from the bed to land at the laughing Sarah's feet, rubbing his head all the while. "Ha-rry, wha'did you do that for?"

"What were you doing in my bed?" Harry gasped indignantly, freeing his tangled feet from the blankets and glaring weakly at Jonas. "You haven't done that since we were tin—" Harry broke off, suddenly remembering the audience of their younger sister; however, he had been too late, and the damage already dealt.

Gripping her sides in mirth, Sarah sank to the floor and trembled as laughter tore through her. She couldn't believe her luck; the blackmail from this moment alone would last her for weeks.

Glaring at her, Jonas picked himself off and, ignoring the creases in his slightly-large pants, pulled the seat of the desk out and lounged comfortably, looking over at Harry whose cheeks were tinted with a pink blush.

"Are you feeling alright, Harry?" he asked suddenly.

"Hm? Fine, why d'you ask?"

"Well, you've only been unconscious for, like, a week!" Jonas rolled his eyes. "There's so much that's happened, it's ... kinda hard to believe, actually. But, now that you're awake and okay and stuff, maybe we could show you around! Hogwarts is huge, it's so amazing, and the forest is incredible, there's-"

"I thought you weren't supposed to go into the forest?" Sarah cut in smugly. "Mum and Dad specifically said you weren't allowed unless you were with Louise."

"And what makes you think I wasn't with her then, hm?"

"Cause if you were with her, you'd be way too busy talking about plants to even notice you were in a forest, idiot," Sarah poked her tongue out, relishing in the familiar sibling rivalry.

Harry shook his head and laughed shortly, closing his eyes briefly. Finally, a sense of normality when his world had, almost literally, been turned upside down.

"I'll get Dad, to see if it's alright to show you around after breakfast! Oh, you're gonna love the food here, Harry, it's so awesome! Even better than Mum's-" Jonas froze, checking the door nervously. "Mum's," he finished in a whisper, before cracking the door open and hurrying out.

"Merlin forbid anything be better than Mum's," Harry joked quietly to Sarah, shifting so his feet hung over the side of the bed and he could lever himself off, swaying a little as he stood.

Sarah watched him all the while, humor fading from her eyes and face as she surveyed her eldest brother.

"... you sure you're okay, Harry?" she asked softly, crossing her arms and frowning. "You look like you've lost weight." And you were already so thin ...

"Well, I haven't eaten in a week, remember," Harry glanced at her quickly before taking a step toward the chest of drawers.

Only for his knees to promptly fold, ending with him kneeling uncertainly on the soft cream rug and Sarah eyeing him sardonically.

"And haven't walked in one, either," Sarah added, just as the door opened once more and a sleepy-eyed James stumbled in behind Jonas.

"Harry? What you doing down there?" Jonas blinked in surprise.

"... it's nothing," Harry muttered, moving to push himself to his feet, but pausing when he saw a familiar hand extend itself before him. Taking his father's hand gingerly, Harry allowed himself to be helped up, even steadied when he showed signs of collapsing again.

"Maybe you should hold off on running marathons for a while, huh sport?"

"Whatever," Harry mumbled, rubbing his forehead in an attempt to relieve the full ache. "What ... what time is it?"

"Uh ... eleven?" James glanced at Sarah who nodded in confirmation. "Eleven. Wow. Haven't woken this late since I was a teenager. You're catching, Harry. Next thing we know, I'll be brooding around the castle and eating the elves out of house and home."

"Eleven?" Harry repeated in disbelief, ignoring his father's antics.

"But – I never ..."

"It'll be the potion. Don't you remember this morning, Harry?"

Harry frowned up at his father, and searched his memories. Bits and pieces came flashing back – the Healer, his mother and father

cocooning him in their warmth, Jonas, floating numbers and charts ... all tinged with an unpleasantly bright shade of-

"Orange?" Harry mumbled in confusion.

"Ah – that'd be Dumbledore. Outstanding wizard, but ... well, we all have our quirks," James said pleasantly.

Jonas snorted, earning a stern look from the head of the family. Luckily, he was saved from damnation and that evening's washing up by the timely arrival of Lily, who was fully dressed and already showered despite having woken with her husband only minutes earlier.

"Harry," she cooed in a manner that suggested Harry would be putting up with much of her coddling for quite a while yet. "Are you ready for breakfa – well, lunch? I can call something up from the kitchens, if there's a tray we can use perhaps you could have breakfast in bed–"

"No!" Harry was quick to protest. "No, Mum I – I can walk. I ... I wanna eat with everyone else, with you and Jona' and Sarah. Is there ... a table or somewhere we can sit?"

Lily surveyed her thin son, taking in his shaking knees and determined face. She sighed, sharing a meaningful look with James. "I'll tell you what. If you can make it to the dining room without collapsing ... you can have lunch with the rest of us. Alright?"

Harry nodded, gripping his father's forearm tightly as he took his first shaky step towards the door.

The following minutes were painful for all involved – James wincing at the bruises and finger marks; Lily hovering over him, torn between keeping her promise and helping her son; Jonas hanging back and watching while his idol struggled with the most basic of human functions; and Sarah, biting her nails as she cringing in anticipation of Harry's failure and depression.

But, despite their worries, Harry soon broke free of the dark, warm corridor, and stood for a moment to observe their shared quarters, taking in the fireplaces, the soft couches, the tapestries and rugs

and half-empty bookcases. The tables and chairs, the small half-kitchen-

The pretty eighteen year old girl sitting quaintly in a sofa by the window, staring solemnly across the grounds while her hands knotted in her lap.

The heavy-browed, middle-aged man sitting at the head of the wooden dining table with a battered copy of the Daily Prophet open beside his plate.

The light-haired child curled into the chair beside his father, pushing his eggs and toast across the plate without bringing the fork to his lips once.

Only the latter turned at his entrance, taking in his appearance with bloodshot eyes, before dismissing his hanging pajamas and returning to not eating his meal.

Harry's breath caught in his throat.

"Wh – who-?" he breathed, as if frightened to disturb the quiet fragility of the air the shared apartment.

"Harry, these are some others from Were," Lily explained softly from Harry's side. "They're staying here as well, since they have relatives enrolled at Hogwarts. They are very lucky to be alive ... just like we are." She smiled at her eldest son, hoping he would catch the subtle hint and praise, but his eyes turned away from hers without the spark of realization or pride, and she realized that she might have to be more blunt if she were to address the dancing elephant in the room. "Here, you can meet them while we eat."

Harry made the last few metres to the table easily with James' help, and was soon settled in beside the tightly-curled eight year old boy; Jonas sat opposite him, Sarah beside Jonas, James beside Harry, and finally Lily at the head of the table between her husband and her only daughter.

The boy shivered when Harry was eased next to him. While James spoke quietly to the kitchens, Harry casually examined him, taking in his bleach-blond hair and olive skin. Something about the boy

tugged at his memory, and Harry found himself frowning as he turned back to his family on his other side.

Blond ... blond hair. Against that particular shade of skin, so distinctive in the way it contrasted. So many memories of that skin smeared with mud as they brawled at the park, sprinkled with rain as they ran for shelter, dusted in flour as they baked for their best friend's birthday and ended with nothing more than a mess, and that familiar playful spark as Zane pelted them with handfuls of-

Zane. Karl. Vienna.

Harry's hands, hidden beneath the surface of the table, trembled where they were resting on his thighs.

Malco. Anne. Beatrice. Frankie.

Manny, Devon, Martha, Kathy - Callistus - Hela - Ryan-Mattius-Preston-Zoee, oh Merlin, oh Merlin, oh Merlin.

Everything came rushing back, as he sat in that room full of light and life and hope. His fingers felt lifeless, his tongue slack, yet heavy, and he could feel his heartbeat raging inside him to the beat of another name, another face, another life.

He didn't notice when baskets of bread and apples appeared on the table before him. He didn't notice when his hair fell over his face, and his shoulders started shaking. He didn't notice when he was blinded by the tears that gathered in his eyes and fell over his face and dripped to his clenched fists drop by single drop.

He drew in a harsh breath. The boy at his side glanced curiously, his short height allowing him to see past Harry's dark fringe and underneath to the expression of horror and pain. The boy stiffened, and cringed away.

And then James finally noticed.

All it took was one touch of his father's hand, and Harry fell apart.

He remembered every time they'd laughed together, every time they'd curled up in each other's lounge on a stormy day, every time they'd played in each other's rooms and stood on each other's

rooftop and held each other's hand and wished that moment would never end. He remembered their last day together. Vienna had just had her hair cut, and the twins were teasing her for the glancing looks she was exchanging with the cashier of the bakery they stopped in. Karl stubbed his toe on an upturned brick, and found a new snorfle-bug to add to his wall of jars. They'd run into Frankie on their way to the fountain, and promised to join him and his mother for dinner next week. Zane wouldn't stop laughing at a joke he refused to share. A joke Harry would never know, now. A joke he wished with all his heart that he could know.

He remembered the day they met, two weeks into their first year of school. Harry had been alone, as always, until Zoee had teased him about his empty face, and Vienna had defended him, then sat with him for lunch, and they'd taken by accident the bench the twins reserved. All four of them were too stubborn to move, and in the end had decided to share. They'd ended up sharing that bench until the day they graduated – carving their initials into the curve of the seat and smiling as they shared their last meal as children.

He remembered his first date with Zoee. The way Zane teased that he only wanted her for her breasts. The way Vienna had smacked their mischievous blond friend, only to add that it wasn't fair of him to discriminate just because she had no other redeeming qualities. The way Harry had blushed, and floundered his way through their meal, turned beet-red at his first cautious kiss, and been dumped not a week later because he wasn't emotional enough ... or something.

He remembered his first party at Manny's. Frankie had smuggled firewhiskey, and he'd ended up grounded for a month after skulking home drunk at three-thirty in the morning.

He remembered his first teacher, and the way she'd taught him how to hold his flimsy practice wand.

He remembered the bookstore owner, and her bright-eyed four-year-old daughter.

He remembered Zane and Karl's father, and his pride in his sons.

He remembered Ryan's lucky rabbit's foot.

He remembered Kathy's pug dog.

He remembered everything.

And then he remembered that it was all – down to the last pebble, down to the last inch – gone.

Jonas had been smearing butter over a white square of bread when he heard Harry's breath catch in his throat. He glanced up, but his brother's face was obscured by a mop of black hair. He saw the boy at Harry's side cringe away from the suddenly trembling teen. He saw his father James reach out, and touch Harry's shoulder gently.

And then Harry's shoulders fell forward, his hands rose slowly to cover his face and mouth, and the most wretched, horrible, heartbroken cry he'd ever heard tore through the room from Harry's hunched form.

James stumbled from his chair and quickly wrapped his arms around his older brother's form, gathering him up and holding tightly as the teen wept. Jonas swallowed against the lump in his throat, but couldn't tear his eyes away from the sight of his brother, his stoic, silent, strong brother breaking.

Beside him, Sarah was pale. She – like him – had never seen Harry cry, not like this, not ever. It was a given to them that Harry just wasn't like that. To see him now, like this – it tore down every illusion they'd held of him, and it tore them down hard. It dawned on them, like it never had before, how deeply Harry felt, how deeply he could feel if he allowed himself.

Jonas' eyes darted suddenly to his glass, the cool liquid twisting in its transparent container without reason. A single bubble of air rose in Sarah's, and an apple rolled slowly across the table towards their brother.

James' eyes caught all this, and more, as the tapestries fluttered and a book fell from its shelf on the far wall.

Time to leave.

Leaving Harry to walk for himself would take too long; instead, James swung one hand across Harry's shoulders, and the other behind his clothed knees before carrying the shaking, crying teen

quickly from the stares of his children and the broken family sitting at the end of the table. Lily could only watch them go, mournfully, before sighing and taking Harry's empty plate. She filled it with four slices of bread, a halved apple, and a pot of jam, before standing slowly with an apologetic look towards the rest of the table.

"I'm sorry," she said sincerely to the single father and traumatized son that stared at her in varying degrees of confusion. "Harry's ... he's different. He just ... needs to cool down. That's all. He'll be fine." Lily wasn't sure if she was reassuring the others, or herself. She left, following her husband and son and shutting off the gut-wrenching sound of Harry's cries as she closed the door behind them.

The man, Samson Bletchley, reached for his glass in the awkward silence that followed. He frowned, dipping his fingertip into the scalding hot water, and glanced between the two remaining siblings in thought.

But then his son's hands clutched at his sleeve, and he quickly forgot the incident in the wake of the pleading, frightened eyes he was faced with.

Commentary: Query with Mild SPOILERS

Do Not Read The Following If You Do Not Want To Know The Future Happenings Of This Fanfiction!

I need some advice from you guys ... I have already written a plot-outline where Harry and his siblings remain outside the education system in Hogwarts, and are tutored one-on-one by certain professors. Jonas would, of course, remain with Louise, Sarah would talk with Lily, Snape and McGonagall, and Harry will attend lessons with, among others, Sirius. This is, of course, the path I would prefer – but I also want to take my readers' opinions into account as well.

An alternate possibility has occurred to me of integrating the Potter siblings into their respective years and giving them a formal education.

So, I ask you now; should I integrate them, or should I have them continue to study independently? Please note that I will be writing

whichever is decided on by the reviews, so choose carefully. Also, if you have other suggestions or scenes you would like to see, please speak up!

Thank you!

Chapter Twelve: Leaping Toadstools

Long slim fingers curled around the neck of his goblet, bringing the rim to his bloodless lips. Sheets of slick hair obscured his ears and jaw, black silk robes hung from his thin shoulders, and an aristocratically hooked nose emphasised every sneer and look he cast over the hundreds of teeming students before him. It was lunch, and today sliced beef and roasted vegetables with bread and copious amounts of sauce seemed to be the menu.

Severus Snape sniffed in distain, and turned to the man beside him.

"If you're going to sit beside me, Black, the least you could do is offer some sort of intelligent conversation, if such a thing is within your capabilities."

Sirius Black smirked handsomely and fingered the sleeve of his luxurious robes casually - specifically, the sleeve which hid his dark ebony wand.

"Ah, Severus, but where would be fun be in that, when it's much more entertaining to watch you suffer in silence?" Sirius' eyes darkened in a silent challenge, and Severus stiffened. The tension between the two men was tangible, the hate between them legendary, and their tolerance of one another barely worth mentioning. It was no small secret that the two loathed each other – which was most likely why Headmaster Dumbledore insisted on seating them together every year, to no avail. "Although, there was one thing on my mind-"

"Quite the remarkable achievement-

"I couldn't help but notice you were late to the compulsory staff meeting on Tuesday-

"Why Albus insists on scheduling those meetings when he knows I have potions to concoct for the Hospital Wing-

"Which just so happens," Sirius' voice rose over Severus', ignoring his snide interruptions, "to have coincided with that attack in Northern Ireland, over 400 dead, you wouldn't happen to know anything about that, would you Severus?"

The Potions Master sneered at the Defence prodigy beside him.

"Why should I hold myself accountable to you, Black? I am my own man, and no one else's. I have potions, very delicate, which cannot be put off or hastened, or weeks of brewing would be left in disaster-"

"Oh, what a shame," Sirius muttered sarcastically.

"The least you could do, Black, is have the dignity to hold a pleasant conversation when we are seated before the children!" Severus snapped shortly, digging a utensil into his plate and glaring down any student that dared glance towards the sudden noise from the staff table. "Have the decency to act like an adult, now that you are technically classified as one!"

"Quite right, Severus," a crisp, prime voice agreed from Severus' other side. The two dark-haired men turned to see Minerva McGonnagal, her hair wound tightly as usual, frowning lightly at the two of them. They hadn't aged a day since they had been students themselves, she mused to herself. "All this disagreement isn't good for the students, we are to provide a stable and united example, not fight among ourselves! Have some decorum, the both of you!"

Sirius smirked playfully and shook his head, releasing his sleeve and taking a deep sip of wine from the glass before him. Severus ignored them both, and turned his eyes towards the quietest of the four long tables - Ravenclaw.

In particular, one small, auburn first year, with painfully emerald eyes and unusually feminine features. Andrew Potter.

His lips pursed.

"Oh, Sirius, did you hear?" McGonnagal spoke across Severus, who made no attempt at hiding his annoyance.

"Hm?" Sirius glanced up.

"Harry Potter, little Andrew's brother – he finally woke this morning."

"Did he now?" Sirius' voice was unusually thoughtful, his eyes sparkling a little as they, too, looked down on the oblivious Andrew Potter.

"Hm, Poppy's over checking up on him now."

Severus hid his sour look by lifting his goblet once more, effectively cutting off the conversation between the two. His eyes were unreadable as they stared down at the youngest of the Potter children.

Harry's eyes were red and enflamed, but finally dry as he emerged from his allocated room behind the smiling Poppy. His cheeks were flushed with embarrassment as he remembered not only his breakdown at the table, but his father carrying him, him throwing himself into James' arms when he was set on his bed, and finally falling into a light slumber as he cried himself into exhaustion despite having just woken.

Then his mother had panicked, thinking he was relapsing, and dragged the Healer from her empty Hospital Wing to check on him. Of course, nothing was wrong – well, aside from the obvious, that is. Poppy had apologised profusely at finding she had woken him not from a magical coma, but from natural slumber – but he had laughed it off, choosing instead to leave his bed on shaky legs and brave the big, new world.

Poppy smiled at the ruffled teen, taking her leave quickly after feeling the silent alert that informed her she had a patient waiting for her in her office.

Harry didn't notice when the Healer left; instead, he took a seat at the now empty dining table, tapping his fingers on the wood and dragging his eyes over the large, open room. His mother and father had retreated to their own room, "to talk" they had told him as they parted ways in the corridor. Jonas had been dragged off by Louise while Harry had been sleeping, and the other occupants – who he had yet to be formally introduced to, he realised – had retreated into their various sanctuaries for the afternoon.

His eyes snagged in their examinations, however, when he spotted a familiar form sitting in the window seat at the far end of the room.

"Sarah?"

Her dark head turned, smiling as she noticed her oldest brother awake and moving of his own accord.

"Ry!" she called happily, hopping down from the cushioned seat and moving quickly to her brother's side as he stood carefully. "Are you sure you should be up? I mean, after ..." They both blushed lightly as memories of Harry's breakdown flooded their minds.

"I'm fine," Harry assured her, silently congratulating himself when he didn't waver as he stepped closer. "What were you doing?"

"Doing?" Sarah looked at him in confusion for a long moment, before following his eyes to the window seat and smiling in realization. "Oh! I was looking at one of the classes down there. I think it has something to do with animals, they're out on the grounds. Wanna join me?"

Harry nodded eagerly, and picked his way across the room, mentally thanking Sarah for not commenting when he stumbled against one soft-backed couch momentarily.

Sarah resumed her place on the high cushions, with her legs tucked under her as she sat back on her heels and peered through the thick glass carefully. Harry mirrored her position beside her, and reached up with a lightly trembling hand to unlock a latch and swing the upper-half of the glass open. A light breeze teased them, bringing with it echoes of laughter and voices caught by the wind.

The two leaned forward, eyes scouring the grounds, just in time to see two very familiar forms leave the grand front door and make their way down a gravel path towards the forest.

"Jonas?" Harry commented, pleasantly surprised. His eyes locked onto the small form of his brother as he happily chattered with his Master and teacher. Harry's lips quirked into a half-smile. "He seems to be enjoying himself."

"Isn't he just," Sarah rolled her eyes, leaning away from the window a little and running her gaze over her eldest brother one last time. "He's taken to the castle like a fish to water – but I think we all know the real reason he loves it here so much." The two shared a teasing

smirk. Jonas had never spent so much time with his Master in one day, that to have her full attention for weeks and weeks unending must've been a dream come true for the enthusiastic herbologist-in-training.

Harry looked back down to the scene below, only for his smile to freeze, and a frown to come over him.

"What's-?" Sarah followed his gaze, and her smile fell as well as she read the situation with a practised eye. "Oh. Oh, Jona'," she sighed in exasperation, leaning her forehead against the window, unable to tear her eyes away even if she wanted to. Harry's hand found hers, and they watched silently as the drama below them unfolded.

"-and then, if you would believe it, later that summer I came across the most peculiar thing – three plants of Alihosty, as clear as can be, nesting right beside, actually sharing the same bed as a herd of glumbumble! Alihosty being nature's enemy to the glumbumble, I naturally thought I must have been mistaken – I checked the leaves, of course, and the points were sickle-shaped in nature, and there's no mistaking a glumbumble when one see's one, I can assure you – so then–"

Jonas soaked in every word his Master spoke, laughing at the absurdity of the situation, groaning at the twists and dramas she revealed, nodding at every new scrap of invaluable information she imparted. He had never felt so complete as the day when he had met her, and learning had never been so easy. He had never struggled in school, per say, but then again he'd never really excelled either. He'd passed, but he'd never had the passion that, say, Andrew had for learning.

But then that day had come. He'd crouched down to tend to the sparse trees in the park, a shadow had loomed over him, he'd looked up, met her eyes – and suddenly, he had felt as if the world stretched before him. Suddenly, he wanted to know everything, and he knew that she - this woman dressed in browns and greens and streaked with dirt on her cheeks and fingernails - was the one to teach him.

He smiled happily at the memory, and stepped faster to catch up when he threatened to fall behind her rapid pace to the Forbidden Forest.

The path they were taking wound down the hill gently, and they were nearly halfway there when, in a comfortable lull of their conversation, Jonas' attention was caught by a booming voice to their right. He glanced over to see an enormously large man towering over a class of students that looked to be the same age as Jonas, a sea of black cloaks with red, yellow, blue or green adorning their lapels. The large man – their teacher – was showing something to them, a streeler by the looks of things. Jonas couldn't hold back his sneer as his eyes caught on the beautifully coloured shell of the giant African, garden-eating snail. Notorious for its venomous slime, streelers were loathed by herbologists everywhere, and Jonas had thanked his lucky stars time and time again that they were native only to certain plains in Africa.

Jonas' eyes were still fixed hatefully on the snail when one dark head – a snake gleaming on the emblem of his robes – turned to stare at him, then sneer distastefully.

"What are you looking at, peasant?" the boy's remarkably unpleasant voice cut his teacher off, and drew the attention of the class towards Jonas and his gentle Master. The two paused in their descent towards the forest, Louise glancing to Jonas with worry, before nudging him to continue walking.

But Jonas couldn't. His attention had been caught by the dark-haired boy, and even though he knew he shouldn't have, even though he knew that he knew better, he couldn't help retorting,

"Just some lame-ass rich-boy who doesn't know when to shut his dimwitted gob." Jonas winced the moment the insult passed his lips, and felt the stern glare of his Master against the back of his head. But it didn't matter that he regretted his statement; what mattered what that is had already been said. And as much as he wanted to, he simply could not take it back.

The boy's stare hardened, and he took a single step towards them.

"How dare you insult me, you pathetic, ignorant halfwit. I saw you looking at us with that hateful look in your eye, I suppose your parents were too poor to send you here, so instead all you can do is envy us, and mock us," the boy spat angrily. Jonas' eyes flitted to the golden Gryffindors (Dad had always told him how chivalrous

Gryffindors were at protecting others from the Slytherins' spite) only to stare in shock when he saw that same angry ... no, superior look on their pale faces, as on the faces of their green-robed counterparts.

"Envy you?" Jonas scoffed, forcing his eyes back to the red-faced boy who challenged him. "Why in the world would I envy you? When I have my Master to teach me all I could ever dream about, I'm not stuck in this wood and stone prison you call a classroom. I'm learning things you would die to know – for example—" Jonas picked a mid-sized leaf from his pocket, and held it between two fingers gingerly. "Do you, in all your wondrous glory as a Hogwarts student, know what this is?"

Stop, Jonas could feel his conscious whispering to him as he felt the cool green of the harmless beech leaf against this skin. This isn't worth it. Stop. You'll get in trouble. Stop.

But as much as he wanted to, he couldn't. The dark-haired boy with the wide nose and flat blue eyes had lit something inside him, some sort of loyalty and fierce protectiveness he hadn't known he'd possessed, and suddenly, all he could think was to defend himself, and his family, against those who threatened and mocked them.

The boy – Malcolm Baddock – glanced to the leaf, then to his side where his best friend and personal tap for information on obscure Herbology assignments, Graham Pritchard, stood. The short, brown-haired teen was staring at the leaf in confusion, alternating between the green of the plant, and the ominous look on the young Potter's face.

"Should I?" Baddock braved, challenging the other young teen's bravado. "Looks like just another leaf to me!"

Jonas laughed, and let the leaf slip through his fingers – only for the leaf to suspend itself mid-air, and waft gently towards the silently watching students as if propelled by a gust of stray wind.

"That only shows you little you truly know about ... the darker side of herbologists, hm?" Jonas smiled in a sickly-pleasant way, smirking at the say the students cringed as the leaf wafted close to them, before settling at the feet of the pair of Slytherins at their forefront. Their eyes were glued to the leaf, as if expecting it to – well, they

didn't know what they expected it to do, but they were wary of it none the less.

Baddock licked his lips, and glared up to where Jonas was standing beside his silently watching Master.

"As if I'd fall for something like that!" he laughed nervously, his pale face revealing his true emotion as he struggled not to step away from the pale green leaf. "You're lying, you filthy peasant! Lying!"

"Jonas!" a sharp voice finally spoke up. Jonas glanced over his shoulder, meeting the eyes of his calm Master and sagging slightly. "That. Is. Enough."

Jonas turned back to the students, looked briefly at the innocent leaf, then shot a quick wink at the quivering students as he pulled his second-hand wand from an inner pocket. He threw a simple spell at the feet of the pale Slytherins, smirking when they flinched as the leaf burnt suddenly. The ashes spread with a silent breath of wind, and Jonas could've sworn he saw the students hold their breath as they floated past them.

When the silent pair had finally made their way down to the forest not two minutes later, Louise turned to her abnormally quiet student and said shortly,

"You should not have done that, Jonas." But then her eyes smiled. "Next time, use screechsnap. Much more intimidating than beech leaves."

Jonas broke into a smile, and the two carried on into the forest, empty bags waiting to be filled with their harvest, eager to hunt rare plants only found in the unique magical climate of Hogwarts. The incident was soon pushed to the far rear of his mind, as he busied himself in the monotonous, but invigorating hard work that accompanied herbology at its finest.

But little did he know that this one moment, this one simple encounter, would have repercussions for days, if not weeks, to come.

Oblivious to the teenage drama unfolding outside the stone walls of the famous castle, Lily and James Potter – after separating from their finally conscious son – were seated side by side on their

luxurious king-sized bed. Their linked hands were resting gently on the deep-blue duvet between them, and their eyes were fixed on a hanging tapestry before them depicting a peaceful country scene. Two cattle grazed by the tapestry's edge, and twice every hour a lone hawk would swoop in the upper right corner.

Lily's startlingly green eyes dropped to her lap, and James' thumb brushed over the back of her smooth hand in comfort.

"James ... oh, honey, what are we going to do?" Lily voiced in a hushed, pained whisper. James sighed, releasing his wife's hand so that he could wrap his arm across her shoulders and pull her against him gently. He pressed a kiss to her deep auburn hair and sighed.

"We'll keep looking, Lil's," he said in a low, patient voice. "We'll keep looking, and hoping that maybe – maybe they've forgotten now? Maybe they've forgiven us, after everything that's ... after everything that's happened."

Lily shook her head.

"They won't have, James, why put yourself through that if you know that in the end–"

"Because you, our children, this family? You're everything to me, Lily, and what kind of father would I be if I couldn't keep this family alive? If I couldn't look after you the way you deserve to be looked after, if I couldn't spoil and treat you the way you deserve to be spoiled and treated?" James rubbed Lily's shoulder slowly. "I know it's going to be hard ... long ... painful, but ... Lily. I need a job. I need a job, and you know it. And the first place to look – as it is with anyone who has ever looked for employment in this wizarding economy – is the Ministry."

Lily released a shaky breath and moved so that she could embrace her husband lovingly.

"Alright," she whispered. "But James, please. Don't let them get to you, alright? If they say no – then leave. We can find some other place, like we did before, alright?"

"Alright."

The two remained there, simply holding each other, for a very, very long time.

That night, Harry met Jannen Perks.

Jannen was fresh out of Hogwarts, two years older than Harry, with curly red hair and light brown eyes. Her sister, Sally-Anne, was the same age as Harry, yet only in her fifth year of Hogwarts. Jannen was tall, slim and pale, with deep bags under her eyes from sleepless nights, and short-trimmed nails worn down from biting and worrying at them.

Harry was opposite her when the collective survivors of the devastation of Were sat down that evening for dinner.

"How was your time in the Forest today, Jonas?" Lily asked her second son as they pulled up closer to the table and began to eat the meal laid out by the elves.

"Fine. We found a knot of leaping toadstools a few minutes in. Couldn't catch any, though. But ... other than that ..." Jonas glanced at his parents nervously, but when they didn't appear to be angry or demanding, he assumed Louise hadn't told them about the incident on the castle grounds, and neglected to inform them of it. "Nothing much happened.'

Harry and Sarah shot worried looks at each other, but said nothing.

The tall, weary-looking man who sat at the opposite end of the table to the Potters glanced between Harry and James, before finally speaking up as idle conversation gradually dropped off.

"I don't believe we've been introduced," he said quietly, speaking directly to Harry. "Samson Bletchey. This little man beside me – who you met during lunch ..." everyone who had been present then shuffled awkwardly, "-is my youngest, Tony."

Harry nodded to the two of them, the young boy – who so painfully reminded Harry of his vanished friends – ducking his head shyly and saying nothing.

"It's a plea ... erm" Harry wasn't sure "pleasure" was the right word to use in a situation such as this, so decided to use instead,

"It's nice to meet you, Mr Bletchley ... Tony." His eyes glanced at the willowy red-head opposite him, but said nothing.

Nonetheless, she soon introduced herself, her voice tame and raspy.

"Jannen. It's nice to see you alive, Harry."

Harry blinked.

"You know me?"

"I've ... heard of you," Jannen kept her eyes on her untouched plate, her fork chasing beans and meat without taking any of it.

Harry's eyes lowered when he realized what she meant. It wasn't so much him she'd heard of – rather, the things he did ... the things his magic did.

"Oh," was all he could think to say. And there really wasn't much else one could say to that, after all.

Jannen returned to her room up the stairs the moment Tony left his soft-cushioned chair.

Harry's eyes followed her briefly, before he quickly turned away and busied himself with stacking plates alongside his brother and sister.

"I'm worried about Andrew."

Sarah looked up from behind a library Runes book, watching as Jonas closed the door behind him and joined his only sister where she sat against the headboard of her twin sized bed.

Taking note of the unusually serious look on her brother's face, Sarah slipped her finger into the book to mark her page, and set the tome aside, giving Jonas her full and undivided attention.

"What do you mean?"

Jonas sat cross-legged, picking at the threads of the bedspread before finally sighing and turning to meet Sarah's eyes.

"It's Thursday."

Sarah nodded slowly. "And?"

"Sarah ... Andrew last visited us on Sunday." Jonas' voice was heavy with implication, and Sarah's eyes closed as she was finally forced to face the facts she had almost deliberately been avoiding the past almost-week.

"Maybe ... he's been bus-"

"He's a first year!"

Sarah breathed deeply, leaning forward and refusing to meet Jonas' bright, determined eyes.

"Sarah ... he knows that we're here, he knows that Harry's condition is, or was in danger ... and by now, based on stories Dad told us of the gossip mill when he was at Hogwarts, he probably knows that Harry's conscious again."

"I know."

"So why hasn't he seen us?"

"Jonas, I know-"

"No, Sarah, you don't know! He hasn't come, Sarah, he is refusing to see his oldest brother, his brother who has always looked out for him and always make sure that-"

"Dammit, Jonas, I know!" Sarah finally shouted, throwing her heavy hardcover book on her bedside table angrily and swivelling on her knees to face her brother head-on. "I know that Andrew has changed, I know that he doesn't think about us as much as he should, I know that ... that Andrew probably has a new family now, a Hogwarts one, and ..." Sarah sniffed, lowering herself back to the bed and scrubbing one eye with the back of her wrist. "Jonas, I just don't ... want to think about it, okay? We always wanted this for him, we always wanted one of us to go here, to have the chance to, to be great ... but we never really thought about what that would mean."

Jonas sighed and shuffled his way to the edge of the bed, swinging his feet to the ground and leaning forward over his knees.

"I just ... he's our brother, y'know?" Jonas spoke slowly, making every word count. "If I had been the one to go to Hogwarts, I know I wouldn't have changed like he has. I would still care about Harry, and you, and Mum and Dad."

Sarah's eyes lit up in understanding, and she regarded her second eldest brother sadly.

"Jonas ... this isn't your fault."

"But what if it is?" Jonas turned, staring hard at Sarah and clenching his fists against his legs. "What if I didn't try hard enough, or didn't talk to him enough, or teased him too much and it made him like – like this? What if–"

"Jonas ... this is Andrew's choice," Sarah said quietly, retaking her book and opening it to the right page once more. "Just let him be. He'll come around. Trust me."

Jonas took one last look at her, before shaking his head, and leaving silently.

Sarah's eyes remained glued to the pages of her book. But she wasn't taking in a single word. Instead, she was thinking ... remembering ... and wishing, more than she had ever wished for anything before in her life, that what she had said would become true.

Commentary: Character Design

One or two people have commented on my character design, in particular of the Potter Siblings, so I've decided to dedicate a small commentary to how I decided on their personality, names, and so on.

First and foremost, their personality. I know that many writers draw from people around them, from people that they admire, or from characters they've read in other texts. I, however, drew Jonas, Sarah and Andrew from the Harry Potter series itself. I'm not sure if anyone has noticed, but there are four Potter Children; just as there are four Hogwarts houses. Harry is (or will be) the Gryffindor we all know and love. Andrew, the only one to be officially sorted, is a Ravenclaw. Sarah, with her tricks, blackmail and sneaky nature, is

the Slytherin of the family. And Jonas, with his undying loyalty for his brothers and sister, is the Hufflepuff. The idea behind this was to demonstrate how well the four can work together and complement each other's strengths and weaknesses. In the books, the four houses were always shown distinctively apart from one another, rarely interacting, and as very different people. In this family, I'm trying to show how wrong that idea is, and how the qualities seen in Gryffindor, Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Slytherin can be used together to great advantage.

Physically, all that needed to be done was mix and match Lily and James' appearances, and try not to have them all as carbon-copies of their parents. Harry; James' features, James' hair, Lily's eyes and body type. Jonas; mixed features, James' hair and eyes, James' body type. Sarah; Lily's features and eyes, James' hair (with Lily's length.) Andrew; Lily's hair, Lily's eyes, James' features.

And finally, the names. One problem I always find with creating original characters in the Harry Potter universe, is that the names one creates never quite fit in with the unique names JK has chosen. Even now, I'm still not satisfied entirely with the names I chose.

Jonas Christopher Potter – 'Jonas,' for the biblical story of the boy Jonah who was trapped in a whale's stomach for three days, and survived. I'm not sure why this story has stuck with me, but it was the first name that came to mind, so I kept it. The second name 'Christopher' is dedicated to my first brother, whose name is also Christopher.

Sarah Angela Potter – 'Sarah' for two reasons; first, it fits with the "normal" vibe the Potters seem to prefer in their children's' names; and secondly, after a childhood friend I always looked up to. 'Angela' is named after one of my closest friends, who I admire greatly for her intelligence and sadistic nature.

Andrew Mark Potter – 'Andrew' after a classmate of mine from my first year of high school, and 'Mark' for no other reason than I think it is a very manly name.

And finally, because someone commented that they'd forgotten the Potters' ages, I thought I'd add their dates of birth and current ages just for reference:

Harry James Potter; 1st August 1980; currently aged 16. (Yes, he really IS born in August, not July.)

Jonas Christopher Potter; 24th March 1983; currently aged 13.

Sarah Angela Potter; 3rd February 1984; currently aged 12.

Andrew Mark Potter; 15th June 1985; currently aged 11.

And the date as at the end of this chapter is Thursday 7th November 1996.

Chp13